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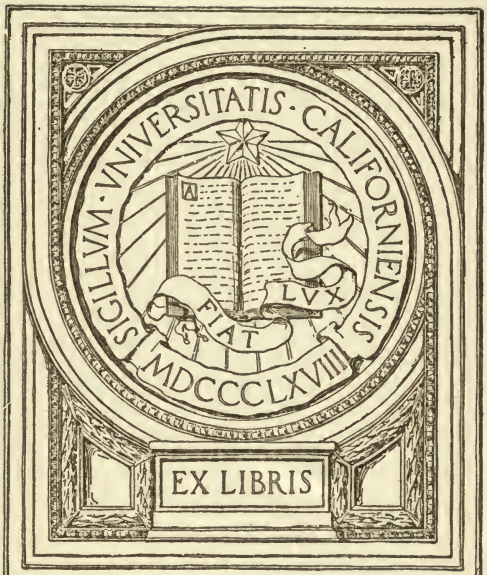
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TRADITION

WITH

ON BAIL, THEIR WIFE, WAITING,
THE CHEAT OF PITY,
AND
MOTHERS

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF CONTEMPORARY LIFE

BY

GEORGE MIDDLETON
Author of *Embers*

. . . "Our deeds are pregnant graves
Blown rolling to the sunset from the dawn."
MEREDITH

NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
1913

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259906

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To
Fola La Follette
whose inspiration and help
made this possible

259906

PREFACE

THE belief which prompted the publication of *Embers,* that some consideration might be granted a volume of serious one-act plays so prevalent on the Continent, has justified the author in writing a further series. These, also, have been conceived essentially for acting, which must of necessity be the ultimate test of a play's value. But this form of concentrated drama possesses, as yet, scant opportunity for commercial production. Consequently, that these little plays might have even a small audience, they have been arranged for easy reading by the elimination of technical stage language. To read a play one must visualize it; therefore, what directions there are have been pointed for the reader so that the moods and motives, which the actors would otherwise convey, may be indicated. The author believes that a dramatist, as far as possible, should be impersonal; though, naturally, he is responsible for the themes—which may be specialized and thus deductively suggest the tendency of his outlook—still, he assumes the right to ask that the philosophy or action of the drama be judged solely from the standpoint of the characters who express it.

In spite of the difficulties of the one-act play—with its obligatory swiftness of exposition and economy of means—the author is confident, too, that it presents peculiar advantages in dealing tersely with the sharp contrasts of character and with the conflicts in social points of view, which, after all, cause most of the vital drama of life. That this may be perfected in abler hands will not deprive *Tradition* of its modest attempt in the same direction.

No deliberate effort has been made to force these plays into a rigid mold; they merely seek to show revealing moments in the larger drama which has preceded or may inevitably follow.

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TRADITION

FIRST PERFORMANCE AT THE BERKELEY THEATRE, NEW YORK CITY, JANUARY 24, 1913.

(Produced under the personal direction of Mr. FRANK REICHER.)

THE PEOPLE

GEORGE OLLIVANT . MR. GEORGE W. WILSON

EMILY, *his wife* . . . MISS ALICE LEIGH

MARY, *his daughter, an actress* . . . . MISS FOLA LA FOLLETTE

SCENE

The sitting-room at the OLLIVANTS' *in a small town up state. It is an evening late in the Spring.*

TRADITION*

A SIMPLE room is disclosed bearing the traces of another generation. Old-fashioned window-doors at the right, overlooking the garden, open on a porch; another door in back opening on the hallway. A large fireplace at the left, now concealed by an embroidered screen; the horsehair furniture, several terra-cotta statuettes, and a wood-cut or two on the walls create the subtle atmosphere of the past. There is a lamp on the table, and another on a bracket by the door in back. Moonlight filters through the window-doors.

The OLLIVANTS *are discovered together.* MARY, *a rather plain woman of about 25, with a suggestion of quick sensibilities, is standing, lost in thought, looking out into the garden. Her mother,* EMILY, *nearing 50, quiet and subdued in manner, is seated at the table trimming a hat. Occasionally she looks at* MARY, *stops her work, glances at her husband, closes her eyes as though tired, and then resumes. The silence continues for some time, broken only by the rattle of the town paper which* GEORGE OLLIVANT *is reading. He is well on in middle life, with a strong, determined face not entirely without elements of kindness and deep feeling. When he finishes, he folds the paper, puts it on the table, knocks the ashes carefully from his pipe into his*

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hand, and throws them behind the screen; takes off his spectacles and wipes them as he, too, looks over towards his daughter, still gazing absently into the garden. Finally, after a slight hesitation, he goes to her and puts his arm about her; she is startled but smiles sweetly.

OLLIVANT

(*Affectionately*)

Glad to be home again, Mary?

MARY

(*Evasively*)

The garden is so pretty.

OLLIVANT

Hasn't changed much, eh?

MARY

It seems different; perhaps it's the night.

OLLIVANT

I guess it isn't up to its usual standard. Haven't seen your mother there so often this Spring.

EMILY

(*Quietly*)

This dry spell is not good for flowers.

OLLIVANT

It's only the cultivated flowers that need care; can't help thinking that when I see the wild ones so hardy in my fields on the hill. (*Turning to* EMILY *and patting her*) Is there any of that spray mixture left, Emily, dear?

EMILY

I haven't looked lately.

OLLIVANT

I'll order some to-morrow. (*Taking up his pipe again and looking for the tobacco*) Think it would be a good idea, daughter, if you'd spray those rose-bushes every couple of weeks. The bugs are a pest this Spring. Where's my tobacco?

EMILY

On the mantel.

OLLIVANT

Wish you would ~~always~~ leave it on the table; you know how I hate to have things changed.

(OLLIVANT *goes to the mantel, filling his pipe, and while his back is turned,* MARY *makes a quick questioning gesture to her mother, who sighs helplessly.* MARY *ponders a moment.*)

MARY

How's Ben been doing these two years, father?

OLLIVANT

Hasn't your brother written you?

MARY

Only once—when I left home; he disapproved, too.

OLLIVANT

Had an older brother's feeling of wanting to take care of you, Mary.

MARY

Yes; I know. How's he doing?

OLLIVANT

He's commencing to get on his feet. Takes time and money for anyone to get started these days.

MARY

But he's still in partnership with Bert Taylor, isn't he?

OLLIVANT

Yes. He'd have been somewheres if he'd worked in with me as I did with *my* father. Things should be handed down. Offered him the chance, tried to make him take it, as your mother knows; but that college chum—nice enough fellow, I've heard—turned his head another way. (*Lighting his pipe and puffing slowly*) It's best to humor a young fellow's ideas if

he sticks them out, but I'd like to have had us all here together now. The place is big enough even if he should want to marry. Your mother and I, came here, you know, when your grandfather was still alive.

MARY

Then Ben isn't making any money?

OLLIVANT

(*Reluctantly*)

Not yet—to speak of.

EMILY

(*Quietly*)

But he's promised to pay his father back, Mary.

MARY

I see. (*Thoughtfully*) College and then more help to get started, because he's a man.

OLLIVANT

(*Complacently*)

He'll have to support a family some day; I've had to keep that in mind.

MARY

I'd like to have a real talk with him.

OLLIVANT

When did his letter say he'd be coming for a visit, Emily?

EMILY

The fifteenth.

MARY

Not till then? That's too bad.

OLLIVANT

Eh?

MARY

(*After exchanging a quick glance with her mother and gaining courage*)

Father, I hope you didn't misunderstand my coming back?

OLLIVANT

Not at all. We all make mistakes—especially when we're young. Perhaps I was a bit hasty when you left home, but I knew you'd soon see I was right. I didn't think it would take you two years—but perhaps if I'd written you before you'd have come sooner. I told your mother I'd like to make it easy for you to come home.

MARY

Mother suggested that you write me?

OLLIVANT

Well, I suppose you might put it that way. I always felt she thought I was a bit hard on you, but I'm not one to back down easily.

MARY

Don't blame me then, father, if I showed I was your daughter.

OLLIVANT

Let's forget my feeling; but naturally I was set back.

MARY

Because you didn't take my going seriously until I was actually leaving.

OLLIVANT

I couldn't get it into my head then, and I can't now, how any girl would want to leave a home like this, where you have everything. You don't know how lucky you are—or maybe you have realized it. Look about you and see what other girls have. Is it like this? Trees, flowers, and a lake view that's the best in the county. Why, one can breathe here and even taste the air. Every time I come back from a business trip it makes a new man of me. Ask your mother. Eh, Emily? When I sit out there on the porch in the cool evenings it makes me feel at ease with the world to know that the place is *mine* and that I've raised a family and can take care of them all. Ben had to

go, I suppose—it's the way with sons; but I thought you, at least, would stay here, daughter, in this old house where you were born, where I was born, where all your early associations—

MARY

(*Shuddering*)

I hate associations.

OLLIVANT

(*Eying her*)

Well, I'd like to know where you get *that* from. Not from your mother and me. *We* like them, don't we, Emily? Why, your mother's hardly ever even left here—but you had to up and get out.

MARY

Yes. That's right, father; I *had* to.

OLLIVANT

(*He stops smoking and looks at her sharply*)

Had to? Who made you?

MARY

(*Reluctantly*)

It was something inside me.

OLLIVANT

(*In spite of himself*)

Tush—that foolishness.

MARY

(*Quickly*)

Don't make it hard for us again.

OLLIVANT

I made it hard, Mary? Because I objected to your leaving your mother here alone?

MARY

I remember; you said I was a foolish, "stage-struck" girl.

OLLIVANT

Well, you're over *that,* aren't you?

MARY

That's just where you are mistaken, father. (*Slowly*) That's why I asked if you hadn't misunderstood my coming back.

OLLIVANT

(*Suspiciously*)

Then why did you come at all?

MARY

I'm human; I wanted to see you and mother, so I came when you generously wrote me. I'm not going to stay and spray the roses.

OLLIVANT

(*He eyes her tensely and controls himself with an effort*)

So you are not going to stay with your mother and me?

MARY

(*Affectionately*)

I'll come see you as often as I can and—

OLLIVANT

—and make a hotel of your home? (MARY *is silent.*) Don't you see your mother is getting older and needs somebody to be here?

EMILY

(*With a quiet assurance*)

I have never been so well and contented.

OLLIVANT

(*Tenderly*)

I know better, Emily; can't I see you're getting thinner and older? (*Stopping her protests*) Now, let me manage this, dear. It's a girl's place to stay at home. You know my feelings about that. Suppose anything should happen to your mother, what would *I* do?

MARY

So it's not mother alone you are thinking of?

OLLIVANT

(*Tersely*)

I'm thinking of your place at home—doing a woman's work. I'm not proud of having my daughter off earning her own living as though I couldn't support her.

EMILY

George!

MARY

I thought it was only because I was on the stage.

OLLIVANT

Well, it's not the most heavenly place, is it? A lot of narrow-minded fools here in town thought I was crazy to *let* you go; I knew how they felt; I grinned and bore it. You were my daughter and I loved you, and I didn't want them to think any less of you by their finding out you were leaving against my wish.

MARY

(*Slowly, with comprehension*)

That's what hurt you.

OLLIVANT

Well, I blamed myself a bit for taking you to plays and liking them myself.

MARY

People here will soon forget about me and merely be sorry for you.

OLLIVANT

(*Persuasively*)

Why, Mary. I've made it easy for you to stay. I told everyone you were coming home for good. They'd think me a fool if—

MARY

(*Tenderly*)

You meant what was dear and good, father; but you had no right to say that. I'm sorry.

OLLIVANT

I did it because I thought you had come to your senses.

MARY

(*Firmly*)

I never saw so clearly as I do now.

OLLIVANT

(*Bluntly*)

Then you're stubborn—plain stubborn—not to admit failure.

MARY

(*Startled*)

Failure?

OLLIVANT

I know what the newspapers said; Ben sent them to me.

MARY

Which ones?

OLLIVANT

Why, all of them, I guess.

MARY

Did he send you the good ones?

OLLIVANT

Were there any?

MARY

Oh, I see. So Ben carefully picked out only those which would please you.

OLLIVANT

(*Sarcastically*)

Please me?

MARY

Yes: because you and he didn't want me to succeed; because you thought failure would bring me home. But don't you think I'll let some cub reporter settle things for me. I'll never come home through failure—never.

OLLIVANT

(*Kindly*)

Ben and I only want to protect you, Mary.

MARY

Why do men always want to protect women?

OLLIVANT

Because we know the world.

MARY

Yes: but you don't know *me.* Father, you still think I'm only a foolish stage-struck girl and want flowers and men and my name in big letters. It isn't that.

OLLIVANT

Well, what is it, then?

MARY

Oh—I want to be an artist. I don't suppose you can understand it: I didn't myself at first. I was born with it, but didn't know what it was till that first time you took me to the theater.

OLLIVANT

So it was all my fault?

MARY

It isn't anybody's fault: it's just a fact. I knew from that day what I wanted to do. I wanted to act—to create. I don't care whether I play a leading lady or a scrub-woman, if I can do it with truth and beauty.

OLLIVANT

Well, you haven't done much of either, have you? What have you got to show for our unhappiness? What have you got ahead of you?

MARY

Nothing—definite.

OLLIVANT

(*Incredulously*)

Yet, you're going to keep at it?

MARY

Yes.

OLLIVANT

What do you think of that, Emily?

MARY

I am going to the city Monday.

OLLIVANT

(*Persistently*)

But what will you do when you get there?

MARY

What I've done before: hunt a job, tramp the streets, call at the offices, be snubbed and insulted by office boys—keep at it till I get something to do.

OLLIVANT

Come, come, Mary; don't make me lose patience. Put your pride in your pocket. You've had your fling.

You've tried and failed. Give it all up and stay home here where you can be comfortable.

MARY

(*With intense feeling*)

Father, I can't give it up. It doesn't make any difference how they treat me, how many times I get my "notice" and don't even make good according to their standards. I can't give it up; I simply can't. It keeps gnawing inside me and driving me on. It's there—always there, and I know if I keep at work I will succeed. I know it: I know it.

(MARY *throws herself into the chair, much stirred.* EMILY'S *eyes have eagerly followed her throughout this as though responding sympathetically, but* OLLIVANT *has stood in silence watching her apparently without comprehension.*)

OLLIVANT

(*Not without kindness*)

Something inside. Huh! Have you any clear idea what she's talking about, Emily?

(MARY *gives a short, hurt cry and goes quickly to the window, looking out and controlling herself with an effort.*)

EMILY

(*Softly as she looks at* MARY)

I think I understand.

OLLIVANT

I don't. Something inside. I never had anything like that bothering me. What's it all mean?

EMILY

(*Quietly*)

So many people use the same words, but cannot understand each other.

OLLIVANT

Well, you seem to think it's mighty important, Mary, whatever it is; but it's too much for me. If you had something to show for it I wouldn't mind. But you're just where you started and you might as well give up.

EMILY

George!

OLLIVANT

Now I don't know much about the stage, Emily, but Ben does. He says you're not made for an actress, Mary; you haven't got a chance.

MARY

(*Turning*)

Father!

OLLIVANT

Can't you see your failure isn't your own fault? If you were a beauty like Helen Safford or some of those

other " stars "—but you're not pretty, why, you're not even good-looking and—

MARY

(*With bitter vehemence*)

Oh, don't go any further: I know all that. But I don't care how I look off the stage if only I can grow beautiful on it. I'll create with so much inner power and beauty that people will forget how I look and only see what I think and feel. I can do it: I have done it: I've made audiences feel and even got my " notice " because the stage-manager said I was " too natural." Helen Safford—what's she? A professional beauty with everything outside and nothing in. You think of her eyes, her mouth, and her profile; but does she touch you so you remember? I know her work. Wait till I get a chance to play a scene with her—which they may give me because I'm not good-looking —I'll make them forget she's on the stage the first ten minutes—yes, and you and Ben, too, if you'll come. Helen Safford? Huh! Why, people will remember me when she's only a lithograph.

OLLIVANT

Well, then, why haven't you had your chance?

MARY

(*Quickly*)

Because most managers feel the way you and Ben do. And not having a lovely profile and a fashion-plate figure stands between me and a chance even to

read a part, let alone play it. That's what eats the heart out of me, mother; and makes me hate my face every time I sit down to put on the grease paint.

OLLIVANT

Well, don't blame me for that.

MARY

(*Going to her mother, who takes her hand*)

You can laugh at me, father: You don't understand. It's foolish to talk. But, oh, mother, why is such beauty given to women like Helen Safford who have no inner need of it and here am I, with a real creative gift, wrapped up in a nondescript package which stands between me and everything I want to do? (*With determination*) But I will—ultimately I will make good, in spite of my looks: others have. And what I've suffered will make me a greater artist.

OLLIVANT

(*In a matter-of-fact tone*)

Are you sure all this isn't overconfidence and vanity?

MARY

I don't care what you call it. It's what keeps me working.

OLLIVANT

(*Quickly*)

Working? But how can you work without an engagement?

MARY

That *is* the hard part of our life; waiting, waiting for a chance to work. But don't think I stand still when I haven't an engagement. I don't dare. That's why I keep at my voice work and dancing and—

OLLIVANT

(*Suddenly interrupting*)

Dancing and voice work when you have no engagements. Would you mind telling me who is paying the bills?

MARY

(*Indignantly*)

Father!

OLLIVANT

I think I have the right to ask that.

MARY

Have you?

OLLIVANT

I am your father.

MARY

(*With quiet dignity*)

You thought you'd force me here at home to do as you wished because you paid for my food and clothes; when you took that from me you *ceased* to have that right. Don't forget since I left you've not helped me with my work or given me a penny.

OLLIVANT

(*Suspiciously*)

Mary. . . . No, that's not why you went away from home?

MARY

No.

OLLIVANT

Or you met some man *there* and . . .

MARY

No.

OLLIVANT

There is some man.

MARY

Why a *man?*

OLLIVANT

Damn them; I know them. (*Breaking*) Good God, Mary, dear, you haven't . . .? Answer me, daughter.

MARY

(*Calmly*)

No, there's been no need of that.

(*He has been violently shaken at the thought, looks at her intently, believes her, and then continues in a subdued manner.*)

OLLIVANT

Then who helped you? Ben?

MARY

How could he help me? Are men the only ones who help women?

EMILY

(*Quietly*)

Tell him, Mary, it's best now.

OLLIVANT

(*Turning slowly to her in surprise*)

You know and have kept it from me?

EMILY

(*Calmly as she puts down the hat she has been trimming*)

I found I hadn't lost my old skill, though it's been a good many years since I held a brush—since before we were married, George. I had an idea I thought would sell: paper dolls with little hand-painted dresses on separate sheets; they were so much softer than the printed kind and children like anything soft. I wrote to Mr. Aylwin—you remember—he was so kind to me years before. He had called here once before when you were away and asked after my work. He used to think I had such promise. He found an opportunity to use the dolls as a specialty, and when I explained he induced some other firms to use all I can paint, too. They pay me very well. I made enough each month to help Mary when she went behind.

OLLIVANT

(*Incredulously*)

You! After you heard me say when she left I wouldn't give her a cent?

EMILY

(*Looking fondly at* MARY)

You were keeping Ben, weren't you?

OLLIVANT

But—that's—that's different.

EMILY

I didn't see why we shouldn't help *both* our children.

OLLIVANT

(*Perplexed by this he turns to* MARY)

And you took it?

MARY

Yes.

OLLIVANT

You knew how she got the money?

MARY

Yes.

OLLIVANT

Your mother working herself sick for you, and you took it?

EMILY

I told you I've never been so happy.

MARY

(*Simply*)

I couldn't bargain with what I felt. I had to study. I'd have taken anything, gotten it anywhere. I had to live. You didn't help me. Ben and I both went against your will, but you helped him because he was your son. I was only your daughter.

(OLLIVANT *eyes her and seems to be struggling with himself. He is silent a long while as they both watch him. Finally, after several efforts he speaks with emotion.*)

OLLIVANT

Mary, I—I didn't realize how much you meant to me till—till I thought of what might have happened to you without my help. Would—would you have stayed on in the city if—if your mother hadn't helped you?

MARY

(*Firmly*)

Yes, father: I would have stayed on.

OLLIVANT

(*After a pause*)

Then I guess what you *feel* is stronger than all your mother and I tried to teach you. . . . Are you too proud to take help from me—now?

MARY

(*Simply*)

No, father; till I succeed. Then I'll pay you back like Ben promised.

OLLIVANT

(*Hurt*)

You don't think it was the money, daughter? It would have cost to keep you here. It wasn't that.

MARY

No; it was your father speaking and his father and his father. (*Looking away wistfully*) And perhaps I was speaking for those before me who were silent or couldn't be heard.

OLLIVANT

(*With sincerity*)

I don't exactly understand *that* any more than the feeling you spoke of driving you from home. But I do see what you mean about brothers and sisters. You seem to think boys and girls are the same. But they're not. Men and women are different. You may not know it, but your mother had foolish ideas like you have when I first knew her. She was poor and didn't have a mother to support her, and she had to work for a living. She'd about given up when I met her—trying to work at night to feed herself in the day while studying. But she was sensible; when a good

man came along who could support her she married him and settled down. Look how happy she's been here with a home of her own that is a home—with associations and children. Where would she be struggling to-day trying to paint pictures for a living? Why, there's lots of men who can paint pictures, and too few good wives for hard-working, decent men who want a family—which is God's law. You'll find that out one of these days and you'll give yourself as she did. Some day a man will come and you'll want to marry him. How could you if you keep on with your work, going about the country?

MARY

(*Quietly*)

You leave mother at times, don't you?

OLLIVANT

I've got to.

MARY

So may I.

OLLIVANT

And the children?

MARY

They'd have a share of my life.

OLLIVANT

A mighty big share if you're human, I tell you. Ask your mother if you think they're easy coming and bringing up.

MARY

And now they've left her. Dear mother, what has she to do?

OLLIVANT

Well, if you ever get a husband with those ideas of yours you'll see what a wife has to do. (*He goes to her.*) Mary, it isn't easy, all this you've been saying. But your mother and I are left alone, and perhaps we *have* got different views than you. But if ever you do see it our way, and give up or fail—well, come back to us, understand?

MARY

(*Going to him and kissing him*)

I understand how hard it was for you to say that. And remember I may come back a success.

OLLIVANT

Yes. I suppose they all think that; it's what keeps them going. But some day, when you're in love and marry, you'll see it all differently.

MARY

Father, what if the man does not come—or the children?

OLLIVANT

Why— (*He halts as though unable to answer her.*) Nonsense. He'll come, never fear; they always do.

MARY

I wonder.

OLLIVANT

(*He goes affectionately to* EMILY, *who has been staring before her during this*)

Emily, dear. No wonder the flowers have been neglected. Well, you'll have time to spray those roses yourself. I'll get the spray mixture to-morrow. (*Kisses her tenderly.*) Painting paper dolls with a change of clothes! When I might have been sending her the money without ever feeling it. No more of that, dear; you don't have to now. I shan't let you get tired and sick. That's one thing I draw the line at. (*He pats her again, looks at his watch, and then goes slowly over to the window-doors.*) Well, it's getting late. I'll lock up. (*Looking up at sky*) Paper says it will rain to-morrow.

EMILY

(*Very quietly so only* MARY *can hear*)

At the art school they said I had a lovely sense of color. Your father is so kind; but he doesn't know how much I enjoyed painting again—even those paper dolls.

MARY

(*Comprehending in surprise*)

Mother! You, *too?*

EMILY

(*Fearing lest* OLLIVANT *should hear*)

Sh!

(OLLIVANT *closes the doors and eyes the women thoughtfully.*)

OLLIVANT

Better fasten the other windows when you come. Good-night.

(*He goes out slowly as mother and daughter sit there together.*)

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ON BAIL

THE PEOPLE

JOHN LINSAY.
MARY, *his wife.*
FRANK, *his son.*

SCENE

At the LINSAYS' *flat.*

ON BAIL*

THE living room of a small flat. It is furnished comfortably with the legacies of better times; the large rug, the furniture, the closed piano, the long plush curtains and decorations, all mixed incongruously, indicate love of things because of past associations. A gas jet, the oil lamps, the ill-concealed cheapness of the wallpaper and wood finish, however, are sufficient to betray forced economies. Through the window near the door at the left, which opens on the stairway, the tops of buildings are seen. Another door is in the center at the back, opening into a still smaller bedroom. A cheap mantel handsomely draped, above a fireplace with the usual asbestos log, is at the right. In the center is a table by which MRS. LINSAY *is seated sewing.*

The outer bell is heard four times in rapid succession. Her face brightens as she recognizes her son's ring. She pushes the bell-button in the further room, returns to her work, and waits. All this seems to have taxed her energy.

MRS. LINSAY'S *hair is already gray, her features lined, and her body quite delicate. She has deep-set eyes, a sweet smile, and long fingers which have apparently*

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grown rough with manual work. She is rather slow in her movements, and seems to have acquired a calm which might be numbness. She wears a gingham wrapper.

After a pause FRANK *enters.* FRANK *is in his late twenties, raw-boned and muscular, with a short, sandy mustache and fairly refined features. There is nothing about him which would attract attention, though his mobile face is not without a certain indication of sensitiveness. He is neatly dressed.*

FRANK

(*Going to her and embracing her anxiously*)

Little mother.

MRS. LINSAY

My boy. (*They kiss.*) You're all out of breath climbing those stairs. They're too much for me.

FRANK

(*Looking at her puzzled*)

How are you, dear? Your hands are cold.

MRS. LINSAY

(*Speaking simply throughout*)

They've been cold for years. It's getting so hard for me to use them. And there's so much more sewing and patching to do. How's Alice and the baby?

FRANK

She'll soon be herself again.

MRS. LINSAY

When did you get back?

FRANK

I came this morning. I made Alice the excuse with the Company. I still had some work to do on my trip.

MRS. LINSAY

(*Pausing at her sewing*)

Then why did you come?

FRANK

You don't know?

MRS. LINSAY

What?

FRANK

(*More surprised*)

He hasn't told you?

MRS. LINSAY

Your father?

FRANK

Yes; where is he?

MRS. LINSAY

In his room, resting. He's going out soon. What is it?

FRANK

You've no need to keep it from me, mother; I know. I saw it in the papers. He's out on bail.

MRS. LINSAY

Arrested?

FRANK

Yes. (MRS. LINSAY *closes her eyes without seeming to betray any emotion.*) Mother; doesn't anything move you nowadays?

MRS. LINSAY

I don't know. But *that* can't be true, Frank.

FRANK

(*Offering her a clipping which he takes from his cardcase*)

Look.

MRS. LINSAY

My eyes are tired.

FRANK

(*Reading*)

"Frank Linsay, who was arrested in a raid at the Dearborn Social Club last Saturday, will be arraigned

at the Madison Court to-morrow on the charge of gambling. Linsay is at present out on bail."

MRS. LINSAY

Again!

FRANK

Hasn't he told you?

MRS. LINSAY

He didn't want to worry me, I guess.

FRANK

Yet he lied to us.

MRS. LINSAY

Yes; he always will to save us pain.

FRANK

(*Bitterly*)

And he promised—promised a year ago to give it all up.

MRS. LINSAY

He said he had. *That's* where he's been nights.

FRANK

Telling us he had a night clerkship—an honest place, at a hotel—with a salary. And I thought I'd never have to face it again.

MRS. LINSAY

(*With acceptance*)

We'll always have to face it.

FRANK

What can we do? We've done everything before—helped him each time. And now—now— Mother, I'll tell him what I think of him.

MRS. LINSAY

He knows.

FRANK

To drag us into this again when we thought he—Can't people stop things? (*Going to door in back and calling harshly*) Father, father, I want to see you.

MRS. LINSAY

(*To herself*)

Again.

(*There is a slight pause when* JOHN LINSAY *enters.* LINSAY *is rather stout, with full cheeks and a round face which gives him an owl-like expression. He is about sixty. He, too, is calm in manner as though without rebellion at anything.*

FRANK *faces him, and* LINSAY *understands at once.*)

LINSAY

So you've seen it in the papers, Frank?

FRANK

Yes.

LINSAY

(*Walking slowly to* MRS. LINSAY *he sits beside her in a long silence while* FRANK *watches*)

I'm sorry, Mary. I tried to keep it from you.

MRS. LINSAY

(*Taking his hand*)

I know, dear.

FRANK

Yet you did it again after you promised us both you'd quit.

LINSAY

(*Simply*)

Yes, I did it again.

FRANK

(*Controlling himself with difficulty*)

You ought to be ashamed of yourself to—

MRS. LINSAY

(*Seeing the slow look her husband gives* FRANK)

Don't, Frank.

FRANK

But you lied to us, and now we're in this mess again.

LINSAY

(*Quietly*)

I'm sorry to give *you* so much trouble.

FRANK

It isn't only me; it's mother and—

LINSAY

Poor Mary. Yes. But I couldn't do anything else.

FRANK

For a year you've made us believe mother was living on honest money.

LINSAY

What difference does that make, so long as she lives? At least *I've* helped her; that's more than you've—

MRS. LINSAY

Hush, dear; don't let's quarrel. It hurts my head so.

FRANK

(*Persistently*)

But why did you do it again?

LINSAY

(*Speaking without emotion*)

I did give it up as I promised and tried to get a place somewhere. I went all over. Everybody knew

me, and those who didn't soon found out. They had bet with me and knew I was honest; they had trusted me with their money on no security but my word—yet they wouldn't trust me to work in their places of business. They'd come to mine, though. Nobody would have me. I knew your mother had nothing and that you had Alice and the baby, with only a little saved. I couldn't bear not giving her as I always had. One day a chance came. (FRANK *smiles sarcastically.*) Oh, you never minded when I won; there's no crime in that. It's losing that's the crime. If I'd lost that time I couldn't have made good, either—the first time I ever did such a low thing. I'd have "welched"; and where would my reputation have been—my reputation, that has always been as good as capital? Well, I won, and mother shared it. I put enough aside to pay her each week like a salary, and I didn't dare tell her the truth. I kept on because I thought I might get back where I was and stop. I always made money. Nobody would have me; what else could I do?

MRS. LINSAY

(*Murmuring*)

What else?

FRANK

(*Referring to clipping*)

And this?

LINSAY

I was informed on. Somebody tried to cheat me, and I wouldn't stand for it. But I paid every cent

when he threatened to get even. I thought of you both. But he didn't keep still. They've got all the evidence they need. I saw the District Attorney; he used to "play" with me before he had to enforce the law. You know him, Frank; he asked after you. He was very decent. Since it was the first offense they could convict on, he's agreed to let me off, if I plead guilty, with a fine.

FRANK

How much?

LINSAY

A thousand dollars.

FRANK

A thousand dollars! Have you got it?

LINSAY

I told you I'd paid the man who "squealed." It took all I had.

FRANK

But who's to pay it?

LINSAY

(*Looking at him slowly*)

You ask me that?

FRANK

It must be paid, mustn't it?

LINSAY

I suppose so. I must go down *there* in a little while.

FRANK

Too bad; if you'd only stopped as you promised.

LINSAY

Yes. But I didn't. (*There is a silence and it is seen that* MRS. LINSAY *is struggling with a problem.*) I—I tried to get you on the 'phone, Frank.

FRANK

Alice said— (*Understanding*) You wanted *me* to —to—?

LINSAY

Who else can I turn to? I thought *you* might give me another chance. I'll be more careful next time. I've always made money—

FRANK

Always made money. (*He laughs bitterly.*) Then why, *why* are you penniless now?

LINSAY

(*Quietly*)

Things "broke" wrong, that's all; they do sometimes. But they always change. With a little capital I know I can—

FRANK

(*Sarcastically*)

—begin again? And you want me to help you to begin again?

LINSAY

(*With a momentary flash of eagerness*)

I tell you I can make money. Once when you were little it happened just like this: Your mother had a little saved. She gave it to me and I made money, didn't I, dear? (MRS. LINSAY *still sits gazing intently before her.*)

FRANK

(*Eying him incredulously*)

And you don't even feel ashamed to ask me.

LINSAY

(*Showing for the first time he is hurt by* FRANK'S *manner*)

Ashamed to ask you—*my son!* (*Hopelessly*) You see, Mary, he's just as I said.

FRANK

How *can* you ask me?

LINSAY

(*Controlling himself with difficulty*)

How can I ask you? Do you think I like it, when you didn't offer it? (*Bitterly*) Do you think I would if I didn't feel I had a right to ask it?

FRANK

Right?

LINSAY

Yes, right. Look at yourself and look at me. I'm old and I've shed my feathers; but they made a pretty good pillow for you. I'm a back number; you're a gentleman. You go where I couldn't put my head. But you're my son! Who gave you food and clothes till you left? Who gave you your education, paid your doctor bills, and saw that your teeth had gold in them? The one you are now ashamed of: I gave them to you. And did I ever hesitate or throw it up to you when I had it? Did you ever refuse it? You knew where it came from and you took it—took it and asked for more. And now you want to know if I'm not ashamed to ask you for a part of it back!

MRS. LINSAY

(*Plaintively throughout*)

John, John, don't.

FRANK

(*Quietly but with feeling*)

Let him, mother. I've always known you felt this way, father. But do you believe that sort of talk can reach me after these years? Don't you realize I've paid, too, for everything you gave me—paid for it with more feeling than you ever could put into your gifts? Was it easy for me to be *your* son?

MRS. LINSAY

Frank!

LINSAY

(*Bitterly*)

Then why did you stay and take?

FRANK

That was the only way I could pay. You can't understand. I knew how you loved me and cared for me. I knew all you gave me and I had only one means of paying—by remembering I *was* your son and staying with you. (LINSAY *smiles sarcastically.*) Had I left when I first found out about you, as I thought of doing, you would have had my ingratitude to face. That, at least, I spared you.

LINSAY

Till now.

FRANK

(*More tenderly*)

Father, don't let's cut each other like this. Only I've suffered, too, with the shame of it all, and I tried —I tried so hard to keep straight myself so you wouldn't regret what you'd both given me. But I couldn't help hating everything your life stood for, and the education you gave me gave me a life apart from you.

LINSAY

(*He bows his head*)

I told you, Mary, we'd educated him beyond us.

FRANK

(*Quickly*)

No; it wasn't that. But I saw if you'd only placed all your energies into something worth while, you'd have something to show for your life.

MRS. LINSAY

(*Looking up*)

We—we have you, Frank.

FRANK

(*Moved*)

Yes; that's the way I tried to figure it out, and I stayed. Besides I loved you both and— (*Going to* LINSAY *tenderly*) Father, before I married I came to you and told you I would help you and mother if you'd give it up. You did, I thought, and I helped, didn't I, with what little I was making? Then when I saw you were on your own feet again, as I believed, I took what life brought. But I didn't marry Alice till—till I thought you and mother wouldn't have to worry. I never suspected you were lying to me.

LINSAY

(*Reluctantly after a pause*)

That's the other reason I went back to the old life: I—I saw I was standing in the way of your marrying.

FRANK

(*Moved and speaking very tenderly*)

I didn't know that, dad. I'm sorry—sorry if I spoke unkindly. But how can I help you now? I've only a little saved up—hardly enough to pay that fine. There's the baby and Alice. Where does my duty lie? How much further claim have you on me because of what you gave me, because I'm your son? (*There is a pause.*) And what will you do afterwards? If you couldn't get a position before, who's to give you more money if you lose? How can you go on? Don't you see what you're asking me?

(LINSAY *seems to realize for the first time what it means. There is quite a pause as he gathers himself together with an air of acceptance. He finally goes to* FRANK, *and puts his hand on his shoulder as though trying to speak, but cannot. He stands thus in silence for some time until he gains courage for a resolve. He slowly picks his hat from a chair and comes to* MRS. LINSAY, *who throughout this has sat tense as though also struggling with some problem yet unspoken.*)

LINSAY

Mary; I've put you through so much, but you've stuck by. We've had nobody but each other, have we? The world you'd liked to have lived in wouldn't take you with *me;* I wouldn't take you into mine. So we've been alone. It seems to me—now that I think

of it—you've made most of the sacrifices. I guess it's my turn now. Sacrifice doesn't seem such a clear thing when one comes to think it over; it's so mixed with other people. But I've figured it out in my head this moment and I see how I can save you both for a while. (*Slowly*) You can look after her, Frank?

FRANK

(*Not understanding*)

Yes, but—

MRS. LINSAY

(*Tensely*)

What do you mean?

LINSAY

(*He leans over and kisses her*)

Mary, dear Mary—

MRS. LINSAY

John!

LINSAY

(*Quietly but with determination as he comes to* FRANK)

I ought never to have said what I did. I *am* proud of you. I don't think there'll be much talk about me; so you needn't fear the publicity. Besides, people who are worth knowing won't blame *you*. But your

mother will be more alone now and— (*Controlling himself.*)

MRS. LINSAY

(*Beginning to understand his intention*)

John!

FRANK

Father!

LINSAY

A thousand dollars. It will be less if I save them the expense of a trial. They let you work it off at a dollar a day, I believe. And with good behavior—

FRANK

(*Incredulously*)

You're not going to—?

LINSAY

(*He looks at his wife, who stares in horror at him. Then he puts on his hat as he opens the door and turns*)

Take care of her, Frank.

(*Before they can speak he closes the door again quickly and goes out.* FRANK *seems stunned; after a few seconds of silent compression* MRS. LINSAY *staggers to her feet and with an effort crosses to the door.*)

MRS. LINSAY

John? John? Not prison. What would I do, John? (*Opens door and calls*) John! John!

(*There is a pause; she comes back closing door and, standing by the window, holds her hands out impotently as though trying to urge him back.*)

FRANK

(*Breaking down*)

Mother, mother, I'll give it to him, get it somehow. You've been reproaching me, too, for refusing.

MRS. LINSAY

(*Embracing him fiercely*)

Reproach you! No, no. You've been my pride—that you've grown away from this. It's I—I—who am to blame. (*With great self-reproach*) I sat there willing to let him go when *I* could have saved him!

FRANK

(*Astonished*)

You!

MRS. LINSAY

Yes, yes; money is all he needs. I wouldn't let him take yours. You have Alice and— I was saving it; saving it in case I should be left alone. And now I *am* alone, what good will it do when I know it would have kept him with me if only I'd given it?

And it was his—his, anyway; *he* made it; gave it to me freely to spend. But I saved every penny I could, like a miser. Even the last year something in my heart told me he was lying to me; I didn't dare ask him. I didn't want to know the truth. So I saved, for I feared something like this would happen again. I didn't let him know I was saving this time. I feared he'd take it all from me as he did before and before that. I wanted to protect myself. I didn't want to have to ask anybody for money. So I saved it, and now, now it could have saved him, and I sat there and didn't give it to him—didn't give it to him—

FRANK

(*Who has been trying in vain to halt her, now waits till she is finished and then soothes her*)

Dear mother; it's not too late. (*She looks up in eager inquiry*) I can phone the District Attorney.

MRS. LINSAY

(*Eagerly*)

Quick, do! (*As* FRANK *is about to take down the receiver she stops him.*) Wait! Wait. A thousand dollars, Frank. (*Slowly*) Do you think—we might get a lawyer? That he might have a chance to get off without paying so much?

FRANK

Father said the evidence—

MRS. LINSAY

(*Pleading*)

But a lawyer wouldn't cost a thousand dollars, and he *might* get off entirely.

FRANK

(*Understanding*)

I'm afraid not; besides, if he stood trial and was convicted— (*He turns again to the phone.*)

MRS. LINSAY

(*Halting him again*)

Wait. Let's think if there isn't any other way. A thousand dollars! I can hardly spare it. (*As though ashamed of herself she comes close to him.*) Oh, Frank, Frank; I love money so. I hate to part with it. It's like blood-money. I've seen its power; seen it change people, seen it change me. Yes; I hadn't any at the start when I married him; my people were poor. I didn't know his business at first; he didn't want me to know. But I loved him and he gave me everything, and I liked pretty things. Then I found out where the money came from. I was horrified. I saw it like everybody. It was terrible. I begged him to give it up; but just then he won a lot of money and he gave me furs and diamonds I had never had, and I wore them, and he promised when we had enough to live on he would stop and— Don't you see? I didn't have the courage to *make* him stop. I

was bribed. I ought to have worked with my hands so he would have given it up and started again with only a bare living if need be. Now I can't— Now I'm not strong enough.

FRANK

(*Trying throughout to calm her*)

Mother.

MRS. LINSAY

(*Clutching herself*)

I've never been able to say it. Let me speak to you this once. We never have. I want you to see I'm not bad; only a weak wife who's loved him, stuck by him, and sacrificed everything—except I didn't make him stop when we were young. Then he had lost it all, too, and I had to give up everything; but he said he'd win it all back, and he did. We could have got along; you and Alice do. That's been my life—you know it; never knowing what the day would bring. I couldn't stand the fear of being penniless, so I saved to protect myself. And I grew to fear I might have to go to work. Look at me now, Frank; I'm worn out. It's money that has sucked me dry. I saw its power. (*With a cry*) God, Frank! after my saving I've got to give it all back to pay a fine!

FRANK

How you've suffered.

MRS. LINSAY

(*Hysterically*)

All to pay a fine! To give my blood-money back to the courts! What will *they* do with my few dollars? Why won't they let me keep it? It would mean so little to them, and I need it so much more.

FRANK

(*Thoughtfully after a pause*)

I suppose Society is taking it back because dad gave nothing to Society for it.

MRS. LINSAY

(*Poignantly*)

And *I* was saving it to give it back!

FRANK

(*Very tenderly after soothing her*)

But you'll have him again.

MRS. LINSAY

(*More quietly*)

Yes; and he's so tired; he looks so worn. He must have suffered, too. He's been so good to us.

FRANK

Dear, at least *we* know that.

MRS. LINSAY

I have nobody but him. (FRANK *makes a motion of appeal.*) No; you're married. Alice has all the claim on you. He and I have only each other.

FRANK

(*At phone*)

Hello. 5789 Main. District Attorney's office.

MRS. LINSAY

(*Murmuring as he awaits the connection*)

I've got to *buy* him back—that's what it is; got to buy him back so he can be with me.

FRANK

Hello. This is Frank Linsay. I wish to speak to the Judge.

MRS. LINSAY

(*Murmuring*)

It would be so cold for him away from the sunlight. He'd be like my hands—all over.

FRANK

Hello. Judge? Yes, father said he saw you. He's coming down. There's been a misunderstanding, and I want to fix it so I can send a check to pay that fine. He doesn't know. Yes; but could you postpone it till to-morrow and have the bail extended?

(*Relieved*) Thanks. Just tell him mother is waiting for him to come back home, will you?

(MRS. LINSAY *gives a sob as she has been leaning near him.* FRANK *can hardly contain himself as the District Attorney has apparently heard the sob also.*)

Oh, that's just mother. Yes; I'll tell her it's all right. Thanks. Good-by.

(*He hangs up the receiver, sitting very quiet. Then* MRS. LINSAY *masters herself, and after a short silence rises and goes over to the chair by her sewing, which she picks up. She tries to work, but cannot seem to see the stitches as she wipes her eyes.*

FRANK *rises and comes to her; he takes her hand and sits beside her. Together they stare before them in wonder at the future.*)

CURTAIN

THEIR WIFE

THE PEOPLE

PAULINE (*who does not appear*).
MARTIN MCCORMICK, *her first husband.*
DUDLEY STANDISH, *her second.*

SCENE

At MCCORMICK'S *house in the city.*

THEIR WIFE*

THE room apparently has been closed for many months. The curtains are down. The pictures, chandelier, and furniture are covered. The rugs, too, are off the floor. Cases in back are piled up, and some packed barrels show everything has been prepared for storage. The room was once very comfortably furnished, and indicates, even in its dismantled condition, the former abode of means. There is a covered piano in one corner; a table and two chairs in the center. The large folding doors from the hallway leading into the street are in the left upper corner. A window with interior shutters is near this.

MARTIN MCCORMICK *is sitting deep in a chair, fingering an opened letter. He is past forty, with a florid face, thin lips, and eyes that continually close into a keen, critical expression. He is fairly built, though apparently not very muscular; a well-groomed, attractive man of the world, in fact, who carries easily his obvious wealth and conversational culture. He gazes long at the envelope.*

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MARTIN

(*Reading*)

"Martin McCormick, Esquire; 16 Gramercy, City." City—so she's here in town. (*He reads the letter*) "I was right. Pauline McCormick-Standish." (*Cynically*) You've still your sense of humor, Pauline McCormick-Standish. . . . So, you're through with your second husband, too.

(*He places the letter against the clock—which is stopped—so that the handwriting is visible. He gets a large leather portfolio from a cabinet in back and with a cynical smile puts it upon the table. While he is glancing impatiently at his watch, the outer bell rings; he looks through the shutters with a quick sigh of satisfaction.*)

I thought you'd come, Standish.

(*He looks at the portfolio again as though it figures in some preconceived intention. He goes out. There is a pause till* DUDLEY STANDISH *comes into the room alone. He glances about quickly, as though he had been familiar with the surroundings. Then he turns and faces* MARTIN, *who has re-entered softly, closing the door. The two men eye each other.*

DUDLEY STANDISH *is about thirty-four, dark, virile, and large-boned, with a frank engaging manner, nervous and intense, obviously controlling himself at present with an effort.*

There is a sharp contrast in manner between the two men, though, throughout, the comic irony of the situation does not escape either.)

MARTIN

The house has been closed since Pauline went West for her divorce. I have only returned from Rome myself a few weeks ago—am living at the Club. I thought we could talk best here—where you used to be so at home with my wife.

DUDLEY

Why did you wish to see me?

MARTIN

(*Pointedly*)

Not for the same reason you came.

DUDLEY

With me it was curiosity.

MARTIN

(*Smiling*)

I'm glad it was not the fascination of a—

DUDLEY

—of a criminal to revisit the scene of his crime?

MARTIN

To marry my wife a crime? I'm not so old-fashioned. Besides I *let* her go.

DUDLEY

(*Half bitterly*)

Yes; you let her go.

MARTIN

(*Continuing casually after a quick glance*)

It is strange, isn't it, to return to old environments with a new point of view? This was *my* home once, *your* visiting place; and now—

DUDLEY

(*Looking about trying to be at ease*)

Now it seems we are both visitors.

MARTIN

But technically I'm still your host. I'm sorry I'm shy on drinks; yet a cigar will help us in this—this unusual situation. (*Offers one.* DUDLEY *hesitates.*) Do take it. Were I revengeful, I would not resort to bad cigars. (*They light their cigars slowly.*) Sit down; you'd better dust it off.

(*As he motions him to a seat* DUDLEY *sees* PAULINE'S *letter on the mantel; he starts, but believes he has concealed his curiosity from* MARTIN, *who has, however, noted it with a gleam of satisfaction.*)

I need not ask if Pauline is well; she was always abominably healthy when she lived here.

DUDLEY

Why did you send for me, Martin?

MARTIN

(*Waving aside question*)

It's like old times sitting and smoking with you. I miss the long candles, our cigars, and Pauline playing softly. Tschaikowsky, wasn't it, she always liked with her coffee? (*After a slight pause*) Has the world gone well with you?

DUDLEY

I've made money.

MARTIN

Fortunate I inherited money, wasn't it? I always thanked the pater for his foresight. The older generation had some good qualities. No business ties for me to break; a quiet disappearance "for my health"; and Pauline's Western divorce on the grounds of my "cruelty and desertion."

DUDLEY

We were both grateful you made no scandal.

MARTIN

One must respect the world's sensitive dislike for such tit-bits. I merely made the convention easy for

you. (*With an abrupt studied seriousness*) But did I make it right for you—inside?

DUDLEY

(*Measuring his intention throughout*)

You mean did I have remorse?

MARTIN

Yes, that moral "hang-over." (DUDLEY *remains silent.*) Dudley, I've always wished to finish the job properly.

DUDLEY

Your part was finished when Pauline was free.

MARTIN

My part is finished when you've ceased to think of me. (DUDLEY *eyes him quickly as though questioning his sincerity throughout.*) So I offer you that complete release.

DUDLEY

(*Sarcastically*)

I did not expect you to be unhappy.

MARTIN

(*Puffing casually*)

Yet, I've been watching you ever since I came back. You have changed; you're worried now in

spite of your words. I know the reason. (DUDLEY *starts.*) You've felt you did me a wrong; it has wormed your happiness together like something between the pages. So do let me reassure you. I got over her leaving me because you both played so straight with me. (*He lets an unobserved malignant look follow* DUDLEY, *who turns away enigmatically.*) I should have remembered longer had you wronged me.

DUDLEY

(*Casually*)

Is that all?

MARTIN

I see you need proofs.

DUDLEY

Thanks; but I'm willing to accept your word.

MARTIN

A posthumous Triangle needs something more convincing than *words* to bury it. And we must bury it to-night—you and I.

(DUDLEY *watches him in suspense as* MARTIN *points to the portfolio on the table between them.* DUDLEY *tries but cannot decipher* MARTIN'S *intention as he continues.*)

Funny, isn't it, how we measure our feelings by inanimate things? But I could not give you these if

I cared for Pauline. These are proofs of your complete freedom from me. Once I held them rather valuable.

DUDLEY

There's no dust on the portfolio.

MARTIN

It never gathered. (*He takes out a bundle of letters.*) Letters. I thought I had burned them all. Oh, these were *before* we were married. Foreign stamps. Of course, these are not mine any longer—but what splendid literature! (*He puts them aside.*) I shall burn these later. She writes wonderful letters, doesn't she?

DUDLEY

She wrote me much the same, I suppose.

MARTIN

But the name was changed. (*Looking at another package*) Later ones. I wonder if there were any *others* while she was writing these to me.

DUDLEY

But why—?

MARTIN

Wait. (*He finds a small passe-partout.*) Ah, here's something to feed one's deepest thirst for irony: our marriage certificate. I never could see why people framed them—especially in passe-partout. *That* wears

out; but Pauline hated anything creased. (*Casually*) Did you have trouble finding a minister?

DUDLEY

What the devil is your game?

MARTIN

Tush; to mention the devil and a minister in the same breath! That's not like one with your moral scruples. (DUDLEY *listens in spite of himself.*) I was proud of this. *We* were married in a little church by the sea—with red geraniums decorating the rocks, bells mingling with salt breezes, as they say in novels. She meant *then* to be faithful. (*He laughs.*) How can one ever promise anything about oneself? The moving sea might have warned us, eh? With this in my pocket we went forth man and wife. But *you* know the sensation. Wait. (*He quickly takes out a lot of photographs*) We took these on our honeymoon. St. Pierre. Did she ever tell you of our adventures in the primitive—we two people of a hothouse group? We were mighty glad to get back to our useless, careless kind. But she said *then* she never wished to part with these. How thoughtless of me to have kept these pictures of our happiness together. (*Slowly*) Will you take them to her?

DUDLEY

(*Pushes them aside slowly as they eye each other*)

You still love her!

MARTIN

(*Purposely enigmatic*)

Would I do this?

DUDLEY

The indifferent are never bitter. You wished to remind me there's a part of her life I never owned—her past with you! (MARTIN *smiles as before.* DUDLEY *seems stunned by this and repeats slowly*) You still love her! You've always loved her!

MARTIN

Did she tell you I didn't?

DUDLEY

Would I have let myself been dragged into—

MARTIN

(*Quickly*)

But would Pauline lie to *you?*

DUDLEY

(*His bitterness escaping*)

I know her pretty tricks.

MARTIN

They were pretty tricks: her way of holding a cigarette as she seemed to kiss the smoke good-by; her strange gowns; her love of flowers. But most of all

her smiles, gestures, and subtle meanings; not beautiful, perhaps—but what has sex to do with beauty? Why are you so bitter against the network they made? Are you afraid *another* may be caught by them as you were?

DUDLEY

(*Facing him squarely*)

So *you* have heard the gossip about us, also? (*Quickly*) That is why you brought me here: to show me you owned most of her past and to gloat in the hope that another man was to own the rest of her future.

MARTIN

(*Protesting*)

But there was gossip about you when she was *my* wife. *I* trusted her. Don't you, now that she is yours?

DUDLEY

(*Hesitating and puzzled*)

Why, of course, I trust her.

MARTIN

(*Blandly*)

How fortunate you both played straight with me.

DUDLEY

(*Suspiciously*)

What has that to do with this gossip?

MARTIN

(*Slowly as he relights his cigar*)

Because no man trusts what he gains by a cheat. (*With insinuation*) Yet—you say yourself she lied to you. She *can* lie beautifully?

DUDLEY

You think you alone had her honesty? It would not have been so hard to fool you either.

MARTIN

(*Working with subtle inflection on* DUDLEY'S *suspicions*)

You mean just as she may now be fooling you?

DUDLEY

(*Involuntarily*)

She wouldn't dare—

MARTIN

—begin deceptions? True; though, as you say, you know her pretty tricks. Your cigar is out.

DUDLEY

(*Brutally*)

You know damn well she and I cheated you.

MARTIN

I don't believe she would have . . . (*Significantly*) yet . . .

DUDLEY

Yet?

MARTIN

I was wondering how else another man could get *your* wife.

DUDLEY

I tell you I trust—

MARTIN

—what you admit you gained by a cheat?

DUDLEY

(*Trying to deceive himself*)

Yes; she hated the lies she had to drag her love through before we finally spoke to you; the fears of discovery, the lame excuses we fooled ourselves with in not wishing to hurt you; the rendezvous, the hypocrisies and careful silences—all. She suffered too much to go over them again. I know she loves me.

MARTIN

But you're not sure—not sure, since, perhaps, you've seen her go from your own arms to my lips as she greeted my unexpected appearance.

DUDLEY

Then how can *you* still love her, suspecting that? (MARTIN *gives him a studied denial.*) Don't deny it. But don't you see, by admitting her deceptions to you it is *I* who am giving you the release from her? She's made herself unworthy of your devotion.

MARTIN

And yours?

DUDLEY

I love her because of the wrong she did for love of me. (*Referring to portfolio*) And do you think her past with you has been standing between us?

MARTIN

(*Insistently*)

Perhaps it did till the other man came.

DUDLEY

(*Less forcibly*)

I tell you there is no other.

MARTIN

She has told you so herself? She often said the same to me about you.

DUDLEY

(*Beginning to lose control*)

She wouldn't do it again.

MARTIN

My pride defended her at first, too.

DUDLEY

Did it, Martin?

MARTIN

Yes. But pride cannot stand long before doubt, eh?

DUDLEY

Mine can!

MARTIN

Are you different from other men?

DUDLEY

I was—until she came.

MARTIN

And *now?*

DUDLEY

(*Breaking*)

Martin, do you know anything?

MARTIN

The question is rather ironic, eh?

DUDLEY

(*Breaking completely as he proceeds, and speaking with bitter doubt and humiliation*)

I went through with it, married her, protected her from the world's gabble because she loved me. But—

but I've never been happy with her, because I always knew how she could lie to you. (MARTIN *gives a sharp cutting laugh.*) Yet I—I never had to face the test till—till *he* came. Yes; there is another man. I didn't dare let her see my doubts, and I wouldn't admit them to myself by *doing* anything. So I threw them together out of mere bravado and pride. Oh, she hasn't changed one bit to me; but she didn't to you either for a long while after I came, did she? She seems happy with me, but happiness may rest only in the lines of her face. I'm always remembering how she was with you, too—all smiles. Yet I knew how unhappy she was then. And now—now? Don't you understand?

MARTIN

(*Smiling cynically throughout*)

Yes; you've seen the other side of the mask while she was showing it to me, and now you're wondering what's back of the mask she's showing you.

DUDLEY

(*Admitting it*)

Yet, I love her. It's terrible to love and doubt; to rest secure in your vanity of possession, yet to feel it fall away completely with each suspicion; to have justified all your own contemptible actions because she loved you, and to be left with only your damnable caddishness when you doubt that love. You're right; I gained her by a cheat and I can't trust her. My

faith in my power of holding her led me on to take the risks of her love; yet now it has become less than my suspicions of her pretty tricks. If I only knew; only was sure. The doubt is harder than any loss would be—for I'd have something to fight. (*Coming closer, with suppressed emotion*) Tell me, Martin; do you know anything? Answer me. I came with the morbid hope you would. Answer me! See how wormed I am that I—should ask *you;* but I can't trust her. (*Haggardly*) To whom could I go? Martin, does she love the other man?

MARTIN

(*Eying him a long while and then speaking with scorn*)

Dudley, I pity you because you failed. I asked you here to make you suffer, and knew your state of mind would make you come.

DUDLEY

(*Eagerly*)

Then you knew the truth?

MARTIN

(*Contemptuously*)

I didn't think suspicions would show the raw small soul of you so. (DUDLEY *makes a helpless gesture.*) But *I* am more to blame for your misery than she is. Oh, I'll explain after you've read that letter.

DUDLEY

(*Getting it*)

Her letter.

MARTIN

I sent for you after it came this morning, for I saw the chance I had been waiting—to punish you for the damnable treachery you played upon me. (*Slowly*) But I see she's made you pay the debt I thought was mine to collect. Read it.

(DUDLEY *reads it slowly and looks up, not understanding its meaning.*)

Before she left she came to me here in this room for her last talk. I'd sent her some red roses—she was always so fond of red roses, you know. She sat where you sit, with her hands resting clenched on her knees. "Martin," she said, "I've got to go to Dudley—but I won't stay." (DUDLEY *starts.*) Oh, don't worry; she loved you right enough in her fashion, only she knew herself, too. I protested; but she said: "Some day I will have to leave Dudley, also; it may be months, it may be years; but there's something inside me that burns up. It was with you, Martin, and the others before you . . ."

DUDLEY

Others?

MARTIN

Oh, she had an artist's gift of exaggeration; you must have discovered that. I tried to argue with

her, but she shook her head—you know that odd little nod of hers. "When it happens," she said, "I will send you a line."

DUDLEY

(*Grimly referring to letter*)

And this—?

MARTIN

Yes. (*He watches* DUDLEY, *whose head is bowed, as he struggles to master himself.*) Listen, Dudley; I was never fooled for one instant about you and her. (DUDLEY *looks up.*) I let you feel I was because I thought you might make her happy. I hated you because you hadn't the decency to come to me first and do it all above board. But I held back because I saw *I* had failed to hold her. She knew herself, as you will see by her note; only I wouldn't let her know I felt she read herself right. I also wished her to believe she could be happy with you. Yet I knew with a certainty this would happen some day, and it has happened. That was my wrong to you; I passed her on to you. I—I wanted to get rid of her.

DUDLEY

(*Sarcastically*)

You loved her! You love her yet.

MARTIN

(*Scornfully*)

What do we three know of *love?* (*After a pause*) I despised you both then for your deception; did until

it was all over. When I went away and heard later you had married, I found I rather hated you; I guess I've hated you—because I had nothing else to do—till you plead with me here a moment ago. Now you amuse me! Now I only pity you as I pity myself and all like us who live in the feverish emotions of the highly civilized. For we're not real persons; breathing the miasma of intrigue in nicely chiseled phrases and trembling over our subtle reactions as though they were caused by a free pulsing passion. You'll see it, just as I see we were but moments in Pauline's life—a life rudderless and relentless, caught by each new wind, yet always making wrecks as it bumps its way along to the end.

DUDLEY

(*After a long pause*)

I think she meant to go straight with each.

MARTIN

That's the pity of it.

DUDLEY

What will she become?

MARTIN

Only what she is. . . . And you must make it easy for her to go on, as I did.

DUDLEY

Let *him* be fooled as we have been?

MARTIN

Why not? One must pay to love Pauline. Maybe she'll bring him the same education she's brought us.

DUDLEY

You mean about trust and a cheat?

MARTIN

Let's call it that. It's as good as any moral a woman like Pauline can ever leave behind.

DUDLEY

And you passed her over to me!

MARTIN

That evens up the wrong, eh? (*There is a pause.*) But come, confess; aren't you a trifle relieved? Oh, it's a bit early yet. In time doubts and suspicions bring their own release. (*There is a silence as* DUDLEY *seems to acquiesce.*) Take another cigar and let's clear up some things that have always puzzled me.

DUDLEY

(*Looking up at him and smiling cynically*)

There are matters *I'd* like to know about, too.

MARTIN

(*Offering cigar*)

I said it should be settled to-night. Let's compare the data; let's discuss *our* wife. Smoke, smoke; that's what it will all be after a while with each of us.

DUDLEY

(*Eying the lighted match*)

But the fire burns.

MARTIN

Only for a while. (*They puff and talk slowly.*) Tell me; that night when I came back . . . ?

DUDLEY

I remember; were you really at the opera?

MARTIN

Yes; but I was in no mood for Tristan. I left in the second act. . . .

DUDLEY

Where the husband discovers . . . ?

(MARTIN *nods and they continue talking and smoking.*)

CURTAIN

WAITING

THE PEOPLE

ROY COOPER.
MISS EDNA OSGOOD, *a school teacher.*
TONY, *an orphan.*

SCENE

At MISS OSGOOD'S *rooms in a small Western town.*

WAITING*

THE scene disclosed is a living room. There is a little cot in the corner for TONY *near a door at the right which opens into* EDNA'S *bedroom. A large balcony window at the left shows, from the foliage and vines without, that* EDNA OSGOOD *is living on the second floor of an unpretentious cottage—that of her old nurse, in fact. The room itself, too, betrays the influence of her personality added to the obvious simplicity of habitual furnishings; and the copybooks upon the long table, the large dictionary, and usual accessories indicate the school teacher utilizes it as her workshop. Some rag-rugs on the floor, and pretty cretonne curtains at the windows, illustrate her attempt to keep an atmosphere of home and comfort. Kerosene lamps, a long Mission couch—strangely incongruous—a family portrait or two, and some other uninteresting pictures, obviously kept hanging out of deference to the nurse, are also noticed. A door from the stairs is at the back.*

EDNA OSGOOD *is seated at the table correcting, with apparent resentment, a pile of copybooks.*

EDNA *is past thirty, tall, with large, brooding eyes and well-rounded lips. She seems to be tired; her hair and dress indicate she has begun to grow careless of appearance.*

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After a few moments a faint shriek of a train's whistle is heard far in the distance; she looks up, listens, and then relapses into thought as she pushes the books aside, slowly crosses to the window-doors, which are open. Then her face brightens and her manner changes to one of interest.

EDNA

(*Calling out*)

Tony, Tony; it's getting late; you'd better come. (*She turns back murmuring*) Tony; dear little Tony.

(*She places the copybooks in her leather portfolio on a chair in back beneath her hat. After a slight pause* TONY *enters; she opens her arms to him, kneeling, and he comes half reluctantly to her. She hugs him with deep satisfaction.* TONY *is about six or seven—an attractive little fellow already assuming masculine attitudes with fists and straddling legs. He has had his golden curls cut and his hair is left in Dutch fashion. He wears a blouse, has bare legs and sandals, is comfortably mussed and dirty, yet, withal, appealing in manner and appearance.*)

TONY

(*Pouting*)

I was having such fun.

EDNA

My, my! How dirty you are!

TONY

I like to be dirty. (*She brushes his clothes as he talks.*) 'Tain't no fun making every day Sunday.

(*She sees a letter sticking from his trousers pocket; takes it and starts as she looks at it intently.*)

I forgot it; I was having such fun. Is it from Uncle Roy? (*She nods.*) Is he coming? (*She doesn't answer.*) He's been away so long, hasn't he?

EDNA

Yes. (*Evasively pointing to stocking*) Look at those holes. My, my!

TONY

Would he always bring me presents if he was my *real* uncle?

EDNA

Perhaps.

TONY

(*Thoughtfully*)

Hope he hasn't forgot that drum. When's he coming? Please don't be cross at me for forgetting—please.

(*He puts his arms about her and she grasps him impulsively to her; then she bursts into tears while he remains still a while.*)

What makes you cry so often?

EDNA

Because I'm a foolish woman; because I love you so much, and because you may have to leave me.

TONY

(*Gravely*)

But I don't want to leave you.

EDNA

You see, Tony, you're not *my* little boy; and I'm not sure whether they'll let me keep you on with me here or not.

TONY

(*Sitting at her feet with his head resting against her knees*)

Who won't let you keep me here?

EDNA

Lawyers and people and things; you're too young yet, dear, to understand.

TONY

If you was my mother, I could stay, couldn't I?

EDNA

Yes, Tony, if I *were* your mother.

TONY

Well, why ain't you my mother?

EDNA

Aren't you, not ain't.

TONY

Oh, you know what I mean.

EDNA

I'm not your mother, because I'm nobody's mother, Tony.

TONY

(*Turning towards her*)

Can't you be my mother? I want a mother so—like all the other fellows. (*She hugs him again, then sighs deeply once as she finishes rolling down his sleeves. There is a pause.*)

Did I ever have a mother?

EDNA

Yes, dear; she was my cousin. She died; that's when I brought you here, two years ago.

TONY

What's to die?

EDNA

It's to go 'way off where no one can see you.

TONY

(*Thoughtfully*)

Don't mothers who go 'way off ever come back?

EDNA

Yes, Tony; sometimes people come back if we think of them enough—but sometimes they come too late.

(*She rises and puts letter on table unopened.* TONY *has pressed his knuckles in his eyes as she turns and smiles.*)

Why, what are you doing?

TONY

Trying to bring my mother back; I want a mother so.

EDNA

(*She goes to him impulsively and kneels by him*)

Dearest, won't I—won't I do to take her place?

TONY

(*Eagerly*)

Will you? (*He holds her off.*) But you can't be my mother unless I call you mother, can you?

EDNA

(*Half shyly*)

Will you call me "mother," Tony?

TONY

Yes, I love you so much—(*Timidly*) "mother."

EDNA

Oh, dearest Tony, kiss me. (*She kisses him and holds him a long while in a close embrace.*)

TONY

(*Drowsily*)

Wish I had a father, too.

EDNA

So do I; but you mustn't wish for too much all at once.

TONY

(*Sleepily*)

Won't you get me one—like the other fellows?

EDNA

(*Looking towards letter*)

It's too late for that—now.

TONY

(*After a pause, almost inaudibly*)

I'm so sleepy—"mother."

(*She holds and pats him a while till he falls asleep; then she stretches him out upon the sofa, kissing his little hand.*)

EDNA

Are you asleep?—Tony? Tony? I have only you —now. (*She sadly shakes her head as she looks at the letter.*) Why didn't you understand, Roy?

(*She replaces the unopened letter and then, after arranging the pillows, covers* TONY *tenderly with her cloak. She opens the windows as the amber sunlight streams in. She looks below, starts at apparently seeing someone, turns, after the door-bell below is eagerly rung, and opens the door in back. With a look of renewed resolution she stands waiting till* ROY COOPER *enters with a parcel, which he quickly places on chair near door. He takes* EDNA *eagerly in his arms with a long kiss, which she accepts passively. Then he releases her and she sinks into a chair.*

ROY COOPER *is about thirty-six; a rather plain man with kind eyes, but otherwise of unspecified features. There is, however, a tenderness in his voice and gentleness in his gestures which convey a sense of reliable manliness and security.*)

ROY

Are you ill? (*He takes her hand.*) You had my letter? (*She points half-heartedly to table.*) Unopened? (*He eyes her curiously.*) I've been away six months, yet for the first time in all these years you did not meet me. (*He sees* TONY.) Oh, it was

Tony; is it fever or—? (*He feels the boy's cheeks and hands.*) There's nothing the matter?

EDNA

Not with him.

ROY

Too bad his mother never could see how he has grown. Dear little chap. (*He goes to her*) And you didn't meet me.

EDNA

I felt you were coming to-day—but—but I just couldn't meet you. You—you had a pleasant trip?

ROY

A successful one, and that means pleasure to me. My other letters—

EDNA

(*Abruptly*)

And now—?

ROY

(*Coming nearer*)

Now I have come to ask you to marry me. (*He continues with a quiet intensity*) When will it be, Edna? It's been a long while that I've waited.

EDNA

That *we've* waited, you mean.

ROY

Of course, dear; I suppose I'm not so clever as many men. But I've got enough for us and for all the other responsibilities of marriage. (*Glancing almost covertly to the child*) I'm secure at last, dear, and now we can go on together. (*She looks away as he continues more buoyantly, holding her hand*) You can give up your teaching, though I know how you love it. I've always hated to think of your working, but I didn't feel I had the right, till we were married, to ask you to stop it. We must move East, as you wished, away from the narrowness of this town, and keep house, of course; I've always wanted a place of my own, and we can afford a comfortable one, too. (*Noticing her apparent inattention*) Are you listening?

EDNA

(*Half wearily*)

Yes, Roy, yes; and what of Tony?

ROY

Why, Tony can come visit us; but he'll have to go back to his guardian soon, won't he?

EDNA

(*Thoughtfully*)

I'm thinking I will legally adopt him myself—if I can. (*He is silent as she crosses to the child.*) You see, I've grown to love Tony very much, and to-day

he called me "mother." I've so wanted to have that name all my own, and this—this is all I will ever get.

ROY

(*Not understanding*)

Edna!

EDNA

I don't mean to hurt you, but let me explain—though it's hard for me to—to speak intimately to you; we never have. Ever since I was little I've wanted children. (*There is a pause as she tries to overcome her diffidence.*) The mother in me was always crying to find expression; with you I thought the answer came. I lived in a hope—a deep hope unspoken to you—and while I was waiting at first, and knew it could be only a hope, I gave what I could of my motherliness to the man; so your work, your efforts became as something I had made.

ROY

You've been very good.

EDNA

But it isn't quite the same as little hands of one's own. And now it's too late for them.

ROY

(*Slowly realizing*)

Edna; you're not going to marry me?

EDNA

No, Roy; I can't now.

ROY

(*Quickly*)

Tony has come between us!

EDNA

No; Tony has shown me the way as I once hoped he'd show it to you.

ROY

(*Confused*)

Edna, Edna; how can you speak this way? Think of the ten years you and I have had.

EDNA

Have we really had them?

ROY

(*Eying her critically*)

What I've suffered during this long absence hasn't changed *me*. I have loved you.

EDNA

But never understood.

ROY

Isn't love understanding?

EDNA

Not always.

ROY

For ten years I've worked to one end.

EDNA

Yet you never asked me to marry you till to-day.

ROY

But how could I ask you when I couldn't *keep* you?

EDNA

That's it! And what was I to do in the meantime?

ROY

Wait—like all other women.

EDNA

That's what we do best, eh?

ROY

That's all you can do when a man loves you. To know my love should have been sufficient—

EDNA

—to fill the emptiness, my loneliness; just the consciousness of your love? (*Unguardedly*) Don't you understand, I wished *life* with you.

ROY

Yet you throw it aside when I offer it.

EDNA

I can't take it now. Something's gone. A woman doesn't only want a man to trust her and be certain of her. She wants something else. Oh, your inexpressiveness, your calm acceptance of the situation, your blindness, the drifting—the years of drifting!

ROY

You blame me, too!

EDNA

I'm not blaming you; you've done what you were. Something beyond is at fault. I suppose I've lived on what we had, but I didn't forget what we hadn't; we've loved differently; you always hated to put feeling into words; you feared to dream in uncertainties yet made me live them. If only once you could have seen what my life has been—simply waiting.

ROY

(*With a touch of sarcasm*)

Waiting has proved what your love was.

EDNA

Waiting itself proves nothing; isn't there always something else at work? There was in me; I didn't

realize it till this last long absence of yours. Had I been your wife you would have known I gave no small love into your keeping. And I've done more than most women for the right to live with you—only you've forgotten it.

ROY

(*More kindly*)

Perhaps I've never known it, Edna.

EDNA

Yes, you have. It's only re-reading the few years—back to when I had to fight for every inch of freedom in my home—I, who was older than most girls returning from college—unsettled, searching, yet in love with you. How could those people at the other end of town interest me after what I had had at college? How could I have lived through those first months if I hadn't had the hope of a home with you away from it all—?

ROY

(*Recalling*)

We were very happy.

EDNA

Yes; and mostly because I never concealed my love for you; I was not afraid, so sure was I of where it led. *That* was something, Roy, in a small town; for

a girl who's labeled and "taken" is left alone. As if I minded that. I was so full of dreams—and I was so ready for everything. (*After a pause*) I was happy. I asked no questions. I didn't think externals bothered you either; we never talked things over even then, you remember; we lived in a mood of acceptance. It never entered my mind you were silent about the fact of marriage—about the mere asking me to be your wife, I mean—because you were poor. But months afterwards, when the reason of your silence flashed on me, and that you were purposely leaving the future of our love indefinite and unphrased—then I *did* resent the fact. And, oh, how it hurt me in my heart to question your spirit.

ROY

(*Groping*)

I didn't wish to bind you.

EDNA

(*Half pitying*)

You thought silence left me free?

ROY

Your father's resentment at my poverty hurt me.

EDNA

Did you once ask if *I* resented it?

ROY

I wished to give you the same as he did.

EDNA

To begin where he left off? Is that what you meant by "security"? I believe it has another name.

ROY

I thought you trusted me.

EDNA

A man can always ride away.

ROY

I didn't.

EDNA

(*Quickly turning on him again*)

But you never spoke! You knew in your heart you were going to *ask* me to be your wife some day; but did *I* know it? Oh, Roy; I tried to reckon with your nature, to help you by showing the difficulties were not so hard as you thought. I knew your pride was hurt because father resented you with a parent's sense of ownership. That's why I left his house. (*He is surprised.*) Yes; so you could be more yourself here when you called with only my old nurse about. Yes, Roy, and more; you shall hear all; it was for you I accepted nothing from my father—and—and took up my teaching.

ROY

(*Incredulously*)

For *me*? I thought it was only because you were bored.

EDNA

Exactly; you believed that, too, without seeking the cause, just as you believed I loved my work. (*Vehemently*) But I've hated it—always hated it, and hate it now. (*He is astonished.*) Yes; I hate it every day I walk up that hill to the yellow brick building with its bell and its blackboard and its children. I don't love other people's children. They seemed to feel my need of their hands, but they couldn't understand why I hated to embrace them. I felt it was disloyal, that I was squandering what belonged to mine alone—and at certain times it was torture to be with them; but I kept up for you, Roy, yes. I smiled, and they say I have succeeded—

ROY

(*Interrupting*)

But what was my part in this?

EDNA

(*Quickly*)

I thought you would see *why* I left home to come here. Don't you begin to understand? I wished to show you I could earn enough to support myself on; that for it I was even willing to do unloved labor.

I sought a chance to contribute, to prove I could share your financial struggles yet live while sharing them; not go hungry inside while you worked alone; not remain dependent in my father's house while you were wearing yourself out to make me equally dependent in yours!

ROY

(*Curtly*)

What books have you been reading?

EDNA

(*Hurt*)

I'm trying to be honest.

ROY

(*Bitterly*)

It's the honest women who seem to hurt men most.

EDNA

(*Quickly*)

I was trying to get my wifehood—that's all. It wasn't the books or theories you sneer at; it was only the instinct of love. Now I see our tragedy is that I was further along the road than you in what I was willing to do to make our life together possible.

ROY

I worked.

EDNA

The man's cry! But you didn't see I was willing to work, too; I thought you would, so we could work together towards financial freedom—when children—But you never said a word, though I hoped such love as mine might break down the man's tradition and pride which held you back "while you couldn't keep me properly."

ROY

(*With head bowed*)

I could only have been happy that way.

EDNA

And are all women happy being "kept"? I wished to live, and look how many wasted years. (*She crosses to the window during a long pause*) Wasted!

(ROY *starts towards her but his eyes fall on* TONY. EDNA *sees him gazing, and she comes to the other side of the sofa so that* TONY *is between them. They speak more softly.*)

Perhaps I guess your thoughts. One must say everything at a time like this.

ROY

I suppose so.

EDNA

(*With a slight diffidence*)

From something you said about children, it struck me you were afraid they would never be possible; that

it wasn't fair to them if a father hadn't all the means to make them happy and comfortable.

ROY

(*Slowly grasping her meaning*)

Then Tony, too, was part of your plan?

EDNA

We're back to Tony. I didn't love him at first, and the child saw it; he was a means, not an end, as he is now. I've grown to love him; I've given him the warmth of my body. At times he gives it back to me and he seems almost mine. I was desperate when I first brought him here—I thought only temporarily. I felt youth slipping away—life passing, with my chances going too. I was just lonely and I'd almost reached the end of my giving to you; so I brought Tony here at first only to show you I could support a child and still work.

ROY

But he had the income—

EDNA

I never touched a penny of that; I told you, yet, you see, it made no impression. (*With reticence*) I tried by doing this to—to make you understand we could have our full life there, also, if only you'd marry

me. (*They gaze together at the sleeping child as she pulls the cloak over him.*) Think, Roy; *he* might have been—

ROY

(*Almost mysteriously*)

Yes.

EDNA

Yes.

ROY

(*Tenderly as he follows her away from the sofa*)

There is one thing you've forgotten. Somebody else bore him, somebody else tended and guarded his mother; you and I didn't. I couldn't have afforded it. That's what I was thinking of. You haven't faced the problem fairly. I—I shouldn't have liked you to have suffered, unless—

EDNA

(*Deeply moved*)

Roy, I knew that, but I wished to suffer; I wanted my woman's right to those pains. What are we to do, we women who are born mothers and have no husbands? And the hundreds, Roy, whose hearts must be breaking because the men they love don't speak. Do any of us think of them? Don't you see I was part of that lonely crowd who want to work, struggle, and share, *anything* rather than live their starved fruitless lives alone—alone.

ROY

(*Sharply*)

Then why don't those women ask it? Why didn't *you* ask me?

EDNA

(*Faltering*)

I tried to—to show you—

ROY

(*Firmly*)

But why didn't you come ask me to marry you?

EDNA

How could *I* do that?

ROY

Why shouldn't you? What held you back, with a man loving you? When you saw I couldn't be made to understand, why couldn't *you* speak, if it was for your happiness?

EDNA

But look what I did.

ROY

I didn't understand that then. I don't understand now why you were silent.

EDNA

But how can a woman—?

ROY

(*Quickly*)

There we have it. It was your pride, too; your *tradition!*

EDNA

(*Incredulously*)

My "tradition"?

ROY

Yes; a woman's inherited feeling that a man must speak first; "tradition"—the "something beyond," you called it. But it's over you, too; it's over us all. (*Slowly grasping the significance.*) I see it now; our spirits can't escape it; it's what tears them when they try to break through. Yes, Edna; you and I have both been its victims; you and I blinded by it and cheated out of ten years of life together—cheated like so many others who let it rule them, or can't help themselves.

EDNA

(*Completely halted*)

I saw it in you; but I never thought I was bound the same way.

ROY

(*Earnestly*)

Then be honest towards yourself for once. Is all the fault mine? Hasn't our problem ceased now that we can talk about it? You've hated my pride so, doesn't your own see you must be tolerant of mine? (*Slowly*) Has either of us changed except in greater understanding? Edna, I love you. You have not changed there, have you?

EDNA

(*As they both watch* TONY, *he moves restlessly and the minutes pass*)

Leave me, Roy; I want to be alone.

ROY

(*Tenderly*)

I'll leave you alone. I know I have your love.

EDNA

It seems silent.

ROY

It is sometimes. Yet silent things are not always dead.

EDNA

(*After a pause*)

I'm tired—tired.

ROY

(*Coming nearer*)

Edna—Edna—?

EDNA

(*Wearily*)

I'm tired, Roy, and numb. I don't seem to know myself. To-day, I only know I love Tony; for he called me "mother."

ROY

(*Smiling*)

I understand.

(*They gaze at* TONY; *then* ROY *opens the package he has brought, disclosing a little drum with drumsticks which he places beside* TONY.)

To-day is Tony's birthday—

EDNA

(*Surprised*)

You thought of that?

ROY

(*Embarrassed*)

I'm fond of the little fellow. . . .

EDNA

(*Detecting his meaning*)

You, too. . . .

ROY

(*As he speaks somewhat haltingly a curious warmth creeps into her face*)

I've never been able, as you say, to speak some of my thoughts; but there's a part of me that has wished for the same things you did. And Tony—well, Tony sort of meant all that. So don't let him go back.

(*He takes up his hat. The day is fading outside, but some dull red rays still light the doorway.*)

I don't understand women, but I've heard some of them don't want to be given up in spite of their words. I've followed the way as I saw it. I'm here now with all the mistakes and blunders of these hard years —and I love you. We have filled each other's minds all that time; I told you we never lose people while we can think of them, do we? No, I won't press you, dear—but I'll come back to-morrow and the next day till you are ready again. I've waited ten years; I won't let one day destroy a hope. Hug Tony for me (*Smiling tenderly*) and remember, he needs a father, too.

(ROY *goes out softly. She tries to speak but cannot. Instead, she goes to the window, breathing restlessly as she looks out after him; in the pause which ensues* TONY *rubs his eyes and sits up.*)

TONY

Say, " mother," I'm hungry.

EDNA

I'll get you something.

TONY

(*Seeing the drum*)

Hurrah! he brought it.

(*He puts it over his shoulder, and walks up and down beating on it.*)

Boom, boom—

(*He stops suddenly, looks thoughtfully at* EDNA, *puts the drum aside and goes to her; she puts her arms about him as she still looks out.*)

Mother?

EDNA

Yes, Tony?

TONY

Why haven't I a father like the other fellows?

EDNA

You had, dear, but he died, too.

TONY

I wish I could wish for him to come back.

EDNA

We can always wish.

TONY

If I wish hard enough, will he?

EDNA

Not always.

TONY

Can I have any father I want?

EDNA

Is there somebody you're thinking of?

TONY

Yes.

EDNA

Who, dear?

TONY

I'm not telling.

EDNA

Are you going to wish for him?

TONY

Yes.

EDNA

Will you tell me who it is if he comes back?

TONY

You'll know then.

EDNA

How will I know?

TONY

I'll call him "father" like I call you "mother."

EDNA

I wonder if I can guess?

TONY

No, you can't. (*After a silence*) I'm so glad I've got that drum.

(*She draws him closer to her as her face has brightened, and they stand together gazing into the growing darkness.*)

CURTAIN

THE CHEAT OF PITY

THE PEOPLE

CRAIG GORDON.
MRS. JULIA HOUSTON.
SQUIRES, *her butler.*

SCENE

At MRS. HOUSTON'S, *New York. Late one Fall evening.*

THE CHEAT OF PITY*

THE room is dark; outside the rain is heard pattering against the panes; the fire is low in the grate at the left, yet betrays the general outlines of a fashionably furnished drawing-room with high ceilings, tastefully papered walls, and long windows at the right. In the back, curtains drape the archway, and dimly the stairs are seen beyond, crossing down out of sight. An elaborate chandelier with glass pendants hangs in the center.

A faint bell is heard ringing far off, and then repeated impatiently. After a pause, SQUIRES, *rotund, middle-aged, and knowing, is seen coming down the steps with a lighted taper. He exits obviously to the outer door at the right, and a low light without soon reveals a spacious hallway. Some words are heard—apparently in quiet dispute; the curtains blow a bit, showing the door has been opened wide and then shut.*

CRAIG GORDON *comes in quickly, followed by the half-protesting* SQUIRES.

GORDON *is tall, nearly thirty, smooth-shaven and with incisive features; his quick nervous manner of eye and lips indicates an impulsive fervid temperament obviously under a violent shock. He is in a business suit and raincoat.*

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SQUIRES

But, Mr. Gordon; Mrs. Houston left particular orders not to be disturbed.

GORDON

Light the lights.

SQUIRES

(*Protesting*)

But—

GORDON

(*He strikes a match and looks at clock on mantel, showing familiarity with the room*)

It's only eleven. Turn on that red lamp; that will be enough. (SQUIRES *does so protesting.*) Now tell Mrs. Houston it's important.

SQUIRES

Mrs. Houston sent you a note two hours ago; perhaps it didn't reach you, sir?

GORDON

(*Laconically throughout*)

It did.

SQUIRES

I hardly think she'll be visible, Mr. Gordon; she went to her rooms at once, sir, after—

GORDON

After what?

SQUIRES

You don't know, sir?

GORDON

Know what?

SQUIRES

(*With discretion*)

I thought perhaps her note explained, sir.

GORDON

Tell her I am waiting, please—at once.

SQUIRES

(*After hesitating*)

Shall I pull the shades?

GORDON

(*Nervously*)

Why, of course.

(SQUIRES *pulls shades, goes out and up the stairs slowly. There is a long silence.* GORDON *has thrown off his raincoat on a chair in back and goes familiarly to the cigarettes on the table near the windows. He nervously lights one, observing the large bunch of faded flowers, which he finally touches cynically. He goes over to the sofa under the red light near the fire and after some impatience takes from his pocket a crumpled letter and reads*)

"Craig, I find I cannot come; I must stay here. Julia."

(*He puzzles over it and then apparently hears the jangle of the glass pendules in the chandelier above.** *He looks up at them until the returning* SQUIRES *attracts his attention. He quickly thrusts the note into his coat pocket and assumes an apparent ease which does not, however, deceive the sharp eyes of the butler.*)

SQUIRES

I'm sorry, sir; but Mrs. Houston begs you to excuse her.

GORDON

(*Obviously hurt*)

Wait. Take her this note.

(*He crosses to desk and lights the shaded lamp above, searching for paper.*)

Any paper? No, here's an envelope. Wait.

(*He takes out the note he has just been reading, and after writing hastily across its back he folds and places it in envelope, which, after a quick glance at* SQUIRES, *he seals. He hands it to* SQUIRES, *who has been watching intently.*)

Hurry.

SQUIRES

But, sir, I don't think—

*N. B. This is not actually heard by audience, but indicated throughout by the characters.

GORDON

(*Curtly*)

Exactly. Do as you are told.

(SQUIRES *stiffens and exits up the stairs again.* GORDON *stands there motionless. The jangle of the glass pendules is apparently heard again; he listens till it stops. He goes slowly to the fire and throws his cigarette into it.*)

Fool! Am I just another fool? . . . No, no; *she* couldn't. No.

(SQUIRES *returns.* GORDON *looks at him eagerly.*)

SQUIRES

Mrs. Houston will be down immediately.

GORDON

(*Relieved*)

Thanks. I'm sorry if I spoke crossly, Squires. I should have remembered your ten years' fidelity to Mrs. Houston. I'm a bit upset.

SQUIRES

This weather is enough to get on one's nerves, sir.

GORDON

(*Realizing* SQUIRES *appreciates the situation*)

Exactly. The sudden change.

SQUIRES

Shall I get you a nip of Scotch, sir?

GORDON

Nothing; thank you. You needn't stay up.

SQUIRES

(*Putting log on fire*)

A log or two will make it cozier here.

GORDON

(*After a moment's reflection and attempting to be casual*)

Was Mrs. Houston taken ill *after* I saw her this afternoon?

SQUIRES

(*Mysteriously*)

Mrs. Houston's not ill, sir. (GORDON *conceals his surprise.*) But she's been upset, too, sir; expected to take a long trip somewhere, I believe; had left us our instructions about inquiries and the like. Was all packed and ready when—

GORDON

(*For information*)

Too bad her baggage should have gone—

SQUIRES

She was fortunately able to stop it in time, sir. (GORDON *is silenced.*) Shall I dismiss your cab, sir?

GORDON

No; I told him to wait.

SQUIRES

(*Eying him keenly*)

Good-night, sir.

GORDON

Good-night. Oh, Squires; you'd better throw out those flowers of mine; you know how Mrs. Houston hates anything that is faded.

SQUIRES

(*Taking them*)

I forgot; everybody has been so upset since—

GORDON

(*Slowly*)

Since what?

SQUIRES

Here's Mrs. Houston now, sir; I'll wait downstairs. You'll ring in case I might be of service?

(SQUIRES *exits in back left with the flower vase.* GORDON *waits before the fire as* MRS.

HOUSTON *is seen slowly coming down the stairs.*

MRS. HOUSTON *is slightly older than* GORDON; *of singular attractiveness in her loose gown trimmed with fur. Her hair is a trifle untidy, which adds strangely to her charm. Her eyes are wide open, and her lips suggest gentleness of breeding and a nature full of nerves and sensations. She appears almost unnaturally calm.*

She comes into the room and stands a second, smiling. Then she pulls the curtain-string, cutting the stairs from sight. She indicates the note in her hand and speaks softly.)

MRS. HOUSTON

You see, I did not *fear* explanation, as you thought. I would be a sorry person, indeed, to have given up all life means to me, if I had not an explanation—or rather a defense.

GORDON

(*With reserve*)

You might have spared this visit and this scene had you written me more fully.

MRS. HOUSTON

Yes, I see it now.

GORDON

I thought of phoning you; but you're the sort of woman one must *see* talk to get your real meaning. And besides—

MRS. HOUSTON

I couldn't have given myself to phrases; they would have killed me. (*Softly*) It was only the fact I was not coming that I had strength enough to convey in my note.

GORDON

Without the least regret.

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Coming nearer*)

There was also a reason for that, Craig; illogical to you perhaps, but clear to me.

GORDON

(*Sharply after her pause*)

Well?

MRS. HOUSTON

I knew, face to face with only my unexplained failure to go away with you, you would have time during the night to hate me or to find you loved me in spite of it. Either way would have made it *ultimately* easier for you.

GORDON

(*Coldly*)

You will be good enough to explain the paradox.

MRS. HOUSTON

You men dislike to suffer for any woman; those you conclude are unworthy you always forget.

GORDON

(*Bitterly*)

You think you know men!

MRS. HOUSTON

At least those you can spiritualize you lift above pain. Others may fill the man's need, but—

GORDON

(*Interrupting*)

Julia; do you realize what it all means? That I am here speaking to you—*here*—when our train now would be taking us on our way?

MRS. HOUSTON

Yes, yes. I know.

GORDON

You know; yet you stand there, calmly *thinking,* without a flush on your cheeks. (*Stepping forward significantly*) I'm a man, Julia. Understand?

MRS. HOUSTON

What woman doesn't?

GORDON

(*Bitterly*)

Yes, it's you I want—you, Julia. (*Closer*) Do you forget our days and weeks and months? Do you forget between a man and a woman nothing remains still? That you reached out to me? That you were going away with me—and that all I was giving up meant nothing before that thought? Julia, you promised me yourself. You send a note, your monogram, and a line of handwriting!

MRS. HOUSTON

Perhaps I might have ended it easier.

GORDON

Ended? (*Coldly*) Why did you fail me? Why do you put me aside when only this afternoon— Was it because at the last moment you saw you did not love me enough?

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Almost without inflection as she listens rigidly to the glass pendules she apparently hears overhead*)

You don't think that, do you? Remember what *I* was risking as proof.

GORDON

(*Sarcastically*)

I won't remind you of what I, too—

MRS. HOUSTON

Yes; and I was willing to take it—to risk your career for a few months' happiness! I know.

GORDON

So it was that which stopped you—the thought of me?

MRS. HOUSTON

I wish it had been, but I loved you too weakly.

GORDON

(*Desperately*)

Then what in pity's name was it?

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Quickly*)

You've said it: pity, pity.

GORDON

For what? Towards whom?

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Slowly and softly*)

Listen; don't *you* hear it, too?

(GORDON *looks at her and they slowly lift their eyes towards the chandelier. They listen thus, spellbound, to the steps above.*)

GORDON

(*Tensely*)

It's a man's step.

MRS. HOUSTON

Yes.

GORDON

It's—?

MRS. HOUSTON

Yes.

GORDON

Your husband's come back—?

MRS. HOUSTON

Yes. (*She continues in a dull voice as* GORDON *sinks into the chair, dazed.*) They brought him here just before I was starting for you. I heard his laugh —first. I was shocked at the change in him; it all seemed to be in his eyes. He met me as though nothing had ever happened. He kissed me—his lips were like ice; called me just as he used to in the old days before—before he struck me—before he left. He had forgotten the months that had passed. I could not understand it all. They told me after they led him upstairs. It's his heart and mind, too; he's on the borderland of day and night, and they say it is in my hands which it shall be—or whether he live at all. (*Repeating slowly*) Whether he live at all. The science of it isn't quite clear to me; I only know I must stay with him.

GORDON

You must stay?

MRS. HOUSTON

Yes. I never could get away from his eyes. (*She shudders violently but controls her nerves.*) It's been his life; he inherited the tendency. I suppose it caused his fits of anger and brutality against me. I wish I had known at the time. The drink and dissipation accentuated it. With care and attention it may not be too late, for he has long lucid hours, they tell me. But a shock or lack of care would destroy everything. He appears to realize it himself, and made them bring him here to the old surroundings. His terror is that he shall go out of his mind; that's why he walks back and forth so much, I guess. He's clinging to me; I must bear him. I haven't it all clear yet; but after a while I suppose I shall take him abroad. I shall try to save him.

GORDON

(*Incredulously*)

You intend to nurse him back?

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Firmly*)

And keep him there if I can.

GORDON

(*Half whispering*)

But, if you succeed?

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Looking at him*)

Yes; I've thought of that.

GORDON

It would mean the old life over again.

MRS. HOUSTON

Perhaps; and—

GORDON

And if—if—?

MRS. HOUSTON

The other way? (*He nods.*) That might mean the complete escape from him. Yes; I've thought of that, too; but only for an instant.

GORDON

(*Hoarsely*)

Julia, Julia! . . .

MRS. HOUSTON

Sh! Don't put it into words; I haven't dared.

GORDON

But it's *there.*

MRS. HOUSTON

So are his eyes—reaching like helpless baby hands.

They would always be between us—if— I would see them every time I lost yours in the dark; just as we would always hear those steps above our heads when it was quiet.

(*The clock slowly strikes. There is a long pause; she comes to him and tenderly places her hand upon his shoulder.*)

Don't you see, dear, how I couldn't write all this?

GORDON

(*Murmuring*)

It isn't just to you; it's not just.

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Wearily*)

It's duty.

GORDON

Say rather your idea of a wife's obligation.

MRS. HOUSTON

It's not because I am his wife. He's a human being who needs me.

GORDON

(*Putting aside her hand*)

The horror, the irony, the injustice. You seem to forget what he was to you.

MRS. HOUSTON

Never. Nor what he has become.

GORDON

(*Pointedly*)

Julia; why should you drag out a watch-dog life like this—chained to him?

MRS. HOUSTON

(*With a warning note*)

Craig, you must be careful not to think of yourself now.

GORDON

I'm thinking of you. I love you. I can't accept the thought of what you must suffer. For years he tortured you with his cruelties, his criticisms, his temper; rubbed the flesh and soul of you raw and brutalized what was best and most intimate in you. And now, now after he left you these two years to flounder as best you could in the equivocal position of a husbandless wife, he comes back, dribble-lipped, with more power over you in his weakness than he had in his strength. I can't stand it, Julia; it's too monstrously terrible.

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Lovingly*)

I thought at first you were speaking for yourself. I'm glad it was only of me. But, dear one, you need

not fear. How can any of his words or deeds touch me now—now that I know your tenderness and that you are waiting? And if I shall have done my duty, how much greater it will all be for having kept love close, though it has taken me from your arms!

GORDON

(*Half resentfully*)

And this is woman's love!

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Quickly*)

Craig, don't regret my having come into your life, or I shall be turned to stone. I will be watching over you in the distance, offering my prayers for your success, living what you do in the fierce intensity of your life. So long as you keep true to my ideal of you I will always love you. Keep it for me; I beg for it from the loneliness I already see before me. I have given you the knowledge of your hold on one poor woman's soul—knowledge some men would die for: the completed love of a woman. I'm not ashamed of that. For I do love you beyond everything—

GORDON

(*Bitterly*)

Only your pity for him is greater. (*She halts.*) Julia, for God's sake, have pity on *me*. I don't want your ready rhetoric. I want you. I love you; you're breaking my heart.

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Poignantly*)

Craig, Craig, don't *you* fail me, too.

GORDON

(*Quickly*)

I fail? Who is it that is failing in the logic of our love, you or I? You seem completely to forget *my* love, *my* life, what this means to me. Haven't I the right to cry out the one word of protest?

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Breaking away half terrified*)

But your strength—?

GORDON

(*Mercilessly*)

How can I be silent when you are putting me aside? (*She makes an impotent gesture of protest as he comes nearer.*) Julia, there is no courage in avoiding other facts; are you so sure you looked at *them* before you made your choice?

MRS. HOUSTON

There was no choice.

GORDON

There always is a choice. Weren't you really carried away by the selfishness which lies back of most

sacrifices? The pleasant martyrdom which you women nurse to your breasts, calling it duty? The glow of halos which always blind your true vision when you feel them settling upon you? You saw his weakness, his need, his obligation: what of my need, my love, and your obligation to my strength?

MRS. HOUSTON

Don't. A woman can't argue these things. She just feels them. (*Breaking*) You *are* thinking of yourself. Oh!

GORDON

(*With increasing bitterness*)

Whom shall I think of if not myself, and you? Is he anything to me but an obstacle, or to you more than a care? He struck all love out of your life before I came; why did he leave it open for another? I'm not his friend; he did not exist when you were about to go with me. (*With scorn.*) I owe him nothing but contempt because of how he made you suffer in the past and because of his power to grind the life out of you in the future. Why *shouldn't* I think of myself? (*She tries futilely to stop him.*) I love you, Julia; you love me. Remember that. What right had you to suddenly make Pity cheat Love? (*She protests.*) Yes; that's what it is. Why should duty demand claims long since outlawed? What right had you to let me come into your life, to make me love you by letting me love you, and then to tear the heart out of me because his eyes made you weep?

Why did you forget this had become *my* problem and not yours alone? Why shouldn't I speak of myself when he can take everything from me with a sob?

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Desperately*)

Craig, Craig, why are you blind? Can't you see you have everything? My love, my prayers, my hope? He has nothing.

GORDON

(*Pushing her aside bitterly*)

He has you!

MRS. HOUSTON

That's nothing—*now.*

GORDON

(*Almost in spite of himself he goes to her passionately*)

I must have you.

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Weakly*)

You can't now.

GORDON

I must. You're mine.

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Trying to evade him*)

Don't drag me down to myself; don't put your hands upon me.

GORDON

You are afraid.

MRS. HOUSTON

But not ashamed as yet. Don't make me be ashamed—don't or I can never look you in the eyes again.

GORDON

(*After a tense pause, as though frozen*)

Forgive my indelicacy; I forgot you have a husband.

(*The steps are apparently heard again in the silence which follows. There is another pause in which she slowly regains her calm as she looks above her, and it is seen he cynically realizes from her expression that further words are useless.*)

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Very finally*)

Good-by, Craig. I must go upstairs; he is alone.

GORDON

(*Accepting her dismissal*)

Yes. I see it is good-by. (*After a pause as he eyes her in wonder*) You're either too small or too big a woman for a man like me. I can't quite make out which.

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Gazing at him without bitterness*)

It would be too difficult a bondage for you either way now, wouldn't it?

GORDON

Forgive me for coming at all to-night. I'm only beginning to learn a woman's philosophy of conduct: inflict suffering on those who can bear it if only in so doing you can soothe those who give you pain; cling to the strong but let the weak cling to you; claw at strength with your pretty fingers, but break the idol, if it dares cry out; risk everything for love, give up everything for pity—

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Calmly*)

Yes; it is what men have taught us; you all play the pity game when you cannot otherwise hold us. You are right; it is a cheat for love. Yet you made the plea yourself. Didn't you? And you had not even the claim of weakness. That's where your failure lies.

GORDON

And your disillusion?

MRS. HOUSTON

Say rather our awakening. That's what it is, isn't it?

GORDON

I suppose so.

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Giving him limply her hand and speaking with deep regret and reproach*)

Craig! Craig! Craig!

GORDON

Good-by?

(*She nods slowly as he turns to go. There is a dull thud, accompanied by a momentary jangle of the pendules above, as though somebody had fallen.* MRS. HOUSTON *clutches close to* GORDON. *They stand there in silence. Slowly she turns to him, an agonized question on her face.*)

GORDON

He's alone?

MRS. HOUSTON

Yes.

GORDON

(*Quietly*)

You'd better go to him; he may need you.

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Shuddering*)

I can't. Suppose—oh! Could he have heard us?

GORDON

Shall I call Squires?

MRS. HOUSTON

No, no. If anything has happened and I was away from him—if he *heard* us—

GORDON

(*Starting towards phone in hall*)

The doctor—?

MRS. HOUSTON

I couldn't talk to him. *You* mustn't—

GORDON

I'll go up—

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Terrified*)

No; don't leave me—

GORDON

He's a human being, you reminded me; he may need help or—

(*He goes out through the curtains in spite of her weak protests and soon his steps are apparently heard above. There is a long pause as she stands tense.*)

MRS. HOUSTON

Suppose, suppose—?

(GORDON *re-enters after a pause and comes slowly down to her, touching her arm; she turns fearing his words, gives him a long look, and seems to read that her husband is dead. She turns from him, broken and quivering, to the sofa.* GORDON *stands by her in silence.*)

GORDON

(*Very quietly*)

You'd better have Squires place him on the bed—and phone for the doctor. (*He halts her impulse to rise.*) I wouldn't go up if I were you for a while yet— As you said, his eyes— (*He pauses*) . . . Is there anything I can do?

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Shivering helplessly*)

Don't leave me now—

GORDON

It's best I go away; it will save talk. And—and besides, Julia, we have said good-by.

MRS. HOUSTON

Craig, I'm all alone now—

GORDON

Yes; just as I was when you said good-by.

MRS. HOUSTON

(*Weakly*)

Have you no pity—?

GORDON

Yes, Julia, that's it—pity. The deepest pity a love can leave behind.

(*He pushes the button on the wall for* SQUIRES, *goes to her, as she has to him, places his hand upon her.*)

Julia, Julia!—

(*He goes out. The door beyond is heard closing. She sways back and forth; her face set. There is a long pause.*)

MRS. HOUSTON

Dead! *Both* dead!

(*She rises slowly and half totters to the curtains in back; she looks slowly up the stairs. But she cannot go and starts back in horror, half wrapping the curtain about her.*)

Squires— Squires!— (*With a strange hysterical outburst*) Squires!!!

(*She stands there nervously clutching the curtain.*)

CURTAIN

MOTHERS

THE PEOPLE

MRS. PARTON.
PHIL, *her son.*
BARBARA.

SCENE

At MRS. PARTON'S, *one Spring afternoon.*

MOTHERS*

A LIVING ROOM in a large apartment hotel. The gray Japanese grass-cloth walls contain an engraving of Del Sarto's Holy Family, and two panels of Giotto—one of which hangs at the door near the left leading into MRS. PARTON'S *bedroom. On the mantel, at the right, stands a small reproduction of a Rodin statuette. Near the fireplace is a large beaten brass wood-box. Mahogany chairs, a couch, covered with a dull kiskeelum, and a table upon which a handsome Oriental rug is stretched complete the furnishings, which bear the stamp of elegance and distinction. A telephone rests on a desk in the rear near the little entrance hallway. Further back is the general entrance from the public hall without.*

MRS. PARTON *is seated, looking with regret at* PHIL, *who leans against a table, nonchalantly smoking a cigarette.*

MRS. PARTON, *a woman of quiet dignity, is about fifty, with iron-gray hair, a firm, thin mouth, high cheek-bones, and searching eyes. She wears a gray tea-gown, with a beautiful fichu held by an old-fashioned gold pin.*

PHIL *is twenty-seven, smartly groomed, weak-*

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jawed, with a slight sneer habitually playing about his lips. His hair is shiny and close brushed, his eyes shifting; yet his muscular frame and ruddy complexion, added to a persuasive voice, give him a certain attractiveness.

MRS. PARTON

What a waste of my womanhood! Oh, my son!

PHIL

I should think you'd be tired finding fault.

MRS. PARTON

This is the first time in weeks you've even let me speak to you. Do you want anything else?

PHIL

(*Flippantly*)

Why can't you be, like other mothers, content to love me and do for me—without treating me as an investment?

MRS. PARTON

That's the mistake we all make with our children.

PHIL

Well, I didn't ask to be brought into the world, did I?

MRS. PARTON

Perhaps that's why I tried to be patient with your failure at college, your failure at business, and then those other matters we don't speak of. (*He moves away, bored.*) When *are* you going to be of some use?

PHIL

People don't understand me.

MRS. PARTON

Don't think muddy waters are deep. (*Resigned*) I've given up trying.

PHIL

(*Eying her anxiously as the telephone rings*)

But you will help me to marry Barbara? (*Halting her*) Now don't have a scene. (*Petulantly as she goes to receiver*) Why must people always talk things over?

MRS. PARTON

I only thought I might be of service, since you expect me to support you both.

PHIL

I told you she had her work.

MRS. PARTON

Which you wish her to give up when you marry.

PHIL

(*Evasively*)

But I only want your help till I find some work that suits me. Besides, father left enough.

MRS. PARTON

(*As she takes down the receiver on the repeated ring*)

Ask her to come up. (*Turning slowly to* PHIL) I suspected for months you and she were in love; I suppose you finally had to let me know, since you needed money to marry on. You'd better tell Barbara I know; then leave us alone together.

PHIL

But it's going to be all right, isn't it?

MRS. PARTON

You say it's been over a year?

PHIL

(*Suspiciously*)

Yes.

MRS. PARTON

(*Pausing at the door and eying him reproachfully*)

A year! and you haven't made something of yourself in that time! Poor Barbara!

PHIL

What do you mean?

MRS. PARTON

(*Enigmatically*)

That I hope I can make it also seem all right to *her.*

(MRS. PARTON *goes to her own room slowly while* PHIL *stands puzzled at her tone. He turns with a shrug and then goes back and opens the door, admitting* BARBARA.

BARBARA *is about twenty, with a frail figure, delicate attractive features, and a vibrant personality. She is simply dressed. She is apparently under a nervous strain as she goes quickly to* PHIL'S *arms.*)

BARBARA

Phil, you've told her?

PHIL

Yes.

BARBARA

(*Eagerly*)

That you and I are married?

(*He tries to hush her and then walks to his mother's door to see if it is closed.* BARBARA *is deeply disappointed.*)

You've not told her that?

PHIL

She knows we want to be married.

BARBARA

But, Phil, she *must* know.

PHIL

It won't hurt to wait a month or so—till she gets used to the idea; then she'll make it easier for us. You understand how parents are. Now don't be angry; leave it to me; I know how to handle her.

BARBARA

(*Puzzled*)

Then why did your mother suddenly ask to see me again?

PHIL

That's natural, isn't it? I told her because I didn't wish her to suspect my being away so much.

BARBARA

(*Hurt*)

Was that the only reason? What about me? (*Plaintively*) We can't go on like this—your just coming to see me. I don't like it.

PHIL

Well, I have my reasons. You be nice to her; and—

BARBARA

And what, Phil?

PHIL

Why, she'll help us so we can live decently.

BARBARA

(*Sweetly*)

But aren't you content to live simply with me on your income? (*He conceals a smile.*) You say it's small; but it wouldn't amount to much more for us two than it costs you now for me. Why ask help of her?

PHIL

Live in that place—that way?

BARBARA

(*Seeing the futility of argument*)

We should have waited till you found something to do.

PHIL

I hate to wait; what's done is done. Now don't say anything yet about our being married—understand? And—and you needn't let slip I made you stop your work, either; she's "daffy" on work.

BARBARA

(*Reluctantly*)

But it isn't fair; she was like a mother to me when—

PHIL

I'm your husband, and if I'm going to support you—

BARBARA

Don't be cross at me, Phil, dear; of course, I'll not tell her if you say so. (*Embracing him*) I love you dear, but—

PHIL

(*Tolerantly*)

There, there, Barbara.

(MRS. PARTON *enters on this and the two women look as though measuring each other.* PHIL *stands between them and for a moment is anxious at what his mother may say; but he gives a smug smile as* MRS. PARTON *silently crosses and kisses* BARBARA.)

MRS. PARTON

I'm glad to see you again, Barbara.

BARBARA

(*Confused*)

Thanks, thanks for that kiss.

(PHIL *smiles in satisfaction and, taking his hat, goes out in back.*)

MRS. PARTON

(*After seeing* PHIL *has gone*)

Sit down, dear.

BARBARA

You've forgiven me?

MRS. PARTON

(*Half reproachfully*)

You used to come very often.

BARBARA

I've missed seeing you; but somehow I couldn't come these months. I felt guilty.

MRS. PARTON

I understand; you were afraid of betraying your love for Phil.

BARBARA

I was silent because he thought it would hurt you to know he—he was marrying. I said it was foolish, yet he thought we both ought to be sure first—and—and—

MRS. PARTON

(*Detecting her embarrassment*)

It was your absence that told me of your love. But I'm sorry my little Barbara didn't come—sooner. (BARBARA *turns away as* MRS. PARTON *eyes her closely.*) I missed hearing about your work in the Settlement. (*Trying to put her more at ease*) How is it there?

BARBARA

Things are always the same with the poor.

MRS. PARTON

You mustn't let it harden you; it never did me 'way back when I was part of it all. You remember, after you were left alone and had to do something for a living, how glad I was I could get you that secretaryship? I liked to think the child of those dear parents I loved might do the work I had left. (BARBARA *gives her a quick glance as though vaguely detecting her intention.*) It's been a sort of consolation to know how it filled your life, too.

BARBARA

(*Naïvely*)

I'm afraid Philip is more.

MRS. PARTON

(*She gazes thoughtfully at* BARBARA *a moment and moves away*)

Too bad! Too bad! It *is* a big problem when a girl with work in her heart finds a man there, too. Hearts are such little things.

BARBARA

(*Nervously*)

I—I suppose it is difficult.

MRS. PARTON

So many women are facing it nowadays. I know you had no one you could talk with. (*Feeling her way cautiously*) Phil tells me he desires you to give up that work when you marry.

BARBARA

Yes, just as you did.

MRS. PARTON

Yes, as I did. If I'd only realized *then!* (*Impulsively*) Barbara, don't give it up! Listen, child; much fails in life; much we think lies deepest; but our work is *always* to be done. At any rate, dear, wait, wait till Phil has enough to support you.

BARBARA

He has that now—the way I'm satisfied to live.

MRS. PARTON

He has nothing but what I allow him.

BARBARA

(*Astonished*)

Only what you allow—? Then it was *your* money—oh!

MRS. PARTON

(*Puzzled and suspicious*)

You're hurt because he has nothing? How could you think he had money of his own? You knew—

(*Incredulously*) Barbara, that had nothing to do with your wishing to marry him?

BARBARA

You mean I was marrying Phil only for his money?

MRS. PARTON

(*Hastily*)

No, no, not that. (BARBARA *covers her face in humiliation. After a slight pause*) But why were you so hurt when you found he had nothing? Why? Why, child?

BARBARA

(*With an effort*)

He—he deceived me about it.

MRS. PARTON

(*Slowly as she gains confidence in her hidden intention*)

And do you believe it—it safe to—to give up your work—to—marry a man who has deceived you?

BARBARA

Women do, don't they? (*With a quick intuitive glance*) Mrs. Parton, you don't want us to marry!

MRS. PARTON

(*Evasively*)

I didn't say that, child.

BARBARA

But you mean it; it's in your voice. Why? Just for this—this slip of his? Perhaps he was too proud. Must I ask *you*—his mother—not to judge him too harshly? Or, is it something about me you don't like and are afraid to say it?

MRS. PARTON

It's because I know you.

BARBARA

You don't know me.

MRS. PARTON

Your mother was very dear to me; I'm speaking more for her child than my own.

BARBARA

That isn't natural. It *is* something about me.

MRS. PARTON

(*Nervously*)

No, no.

BARBARA

Yes, it is. (*With a sudden cheerfulness*) You don't believe I'd make him a good wife! You haven't any idea what a good wife I can—I could be. (*Kneeling affectionately beside her*) Don't you remember how I had to take care of mother and father at the end?

And I never told you, but once, when I needed money before I went to the Settlement, I took care of some children. I'd make him a good wife—I'd stand by and go through everything with him, really I would. Now don't be afraid that way, dear Mrs. Parton.

MRS. PARTON

You make it very difficult for me. It's because you are what you are that I am afraid—afraid it would be wasted when the world needs it—afraid he wouldn't make you a good husband. There; I've said it.

BARBARA

(*Wistfully*)

I think he'd take care of me—

MRS. PARTON

Don't misunderstand. I'm almost an old woman in my heart. I'm thinking of you.

BARBARA

Of me?

MRS. PARTON

Yes, of you. A waif of a woman, alone, stepping towards the dark.

BARBARA

(*Retreating*)

You're speaking as though you didn't want me to be happy.

MRS. PARTON

(*Tenderly*)

Would it be happiness?

BARBARA

I know best about that.

MRS. PARTON

No. You love him.

BARBARA

And don't you?

MRS. PARTON

I've given him everything. I suppose that's love.

BARBARA

Yet you're trying to separate us. You're afraid I'm taking him from you. (MRS. PARTON *protests.*) That's the way with parents, I've heard: they give and give and think they own.

MRS. PARTON

I'm not urging a mother's claim.

BARBARA

Forgive me; I didn't mean to say anything unkind. I suppose I'd be like other mothers. I'm not trying

to take him from you. Oh, if I could only prove to you I don't wish to make you suffer.

MRS. PARTON

(*Seeing an opening*)

If you feel that way and really mean it—and want to make it easier for *me*—promise me you won't marry him yet.

BARBARA

I *can't* promise you that—

MRS. PARTON

You must.

BARBARA

(*Nervously*)

But have you asked him? Would he be willing—if—if—

MRS. PARTON

I can't talk with my son.

BARBARA

Why must we wait? Why? Give me the real reason?

MRS. PARTON

Are you brave enough to hear it?

BARBARA

If you are to say it.

MRS. PARTON

I want to prevent my son making a waste of your life.

BARBARA

Oh!

MRS. PARTON

Before you marry he should prove himself worthy of what you will bring him!

BARBARA

You think him unworthy?

MRS. PARTON

Is this easy for me to say?

BARBARA

How can you say it at all? His mother! And most of all—to me!

MRS. PARTON

(*With increasing feeling*)

Why not? Must motherhood always mean blindness? Because I'm his mother must I shield his faults, excuse his deficiencies, and let him hurt the lives of others? Must motherhood be destructive because it loves? I'm sick to death of the world's view that praises such an instinct. I'm tired of hearing "motherhood is its own reward." *I* know it isn't always so.

After we have taken from it the last drop of feeling, the joy of creating and the thrill of hearing that first thin baby cry which ends our pain; after the years of care are done and the cord is cut a second time by the world that claims the man—can't a mother ask whether it was all worth while? Can't she wonder, when she is left alone, as I am, having nothing to do with the rest of my life, with work and health sacrificed for my child, can't she wonder whether the whole of woman's life is for that alone? And if that is so, what answer comes back upon her in her middle-aged loneliness when she sees the product of it all is nothing—nothing; a son with good blood and strong bones, but a breathing useless nothing that is a reproach and waste of all her love and care? Must she be silent because she's his mother while he seeks another woman he will drain the same way?

BARBARA

(*Who has stood shocked through this*)

You feel that way about Phil?

MRS. PARTON

(*Bitterly*)

What else have *I* to show for my life but him? And in what he has become lies its failure.

BARBARA

(*Desperately*)

But he's the reason for my life—the only thing that can make it a success.

MRS. PARTON

Just because you love him? What does that amount to if he drains you? Oh, Barbara, for months this thought has been breaking through every inheritance and instinct in me. I tried not to tell you; but you must see I mean it from my heart. My life has been a failure, for I could have brought more happiness—have created more in the world, if I had given *it* all I have given to him.

BARBARA

(*Distracted*)

I won't listen to you. If you only realized how cruel and unnatural to tell *me* that!

MRS. PARTON

(*Poignantly*)

And he *my* son!

BARBARA

He's *my* Phil, too. He's mine; I love him. I don't care what he was or is in your eyes; I know what my love can make him.

MRS. PARTON

(*Quickly*)

What *can* your love make of him? Answer me, Barbara. (BARBARA *hesitates.*) Your splendid defending love that protects him as it should, what has

he done with it, Barbara? (*More tenderly*) For one whole wonderful year he has loved you; had all that you meant to him to reach towards, a future to make beautiful for you, and what has he done with that love? Has he taken his part in the world of men? Has he worked, contributed, given of his hands and brain? Has he even failed through honest effort? And what has he done to you? Answer me, dear; has he kept your love in the sun or hidden it—?

BARBARA

I was too busy loving him to think of that.

MRS. PARTON

And I deceived myself for years the same way; blamed the world as mothers will, because it didn't help him. But if you stop feeling long enough to think, as I have, you'll know all I say is true.

BARBARA

(*Shuddering*)

Don't! Don't!

MRS. PARTON

(*Close beside her*)

Oh, how I prayed with the hope a woman might come and through her love make him all I failed to. But, Barbara, even with your love in his life—

BARBARA

(*Slowly between sobs*)

I know. I know; I didn't want to see it, either. But what's a girl to do when she loves—?

MRS. PARTON

(*Firmly, as though she had thought it out before*)

There is a way still; it's not too late.

BARBARA

(*Starting up rigidly*)

Yes?

MRS. PARTON

Leave him.

BARBARA

(*Trying to find words*)

And hurt him?

MRS. PARTON

Perhaps that loss and that alone may change him. He's never suffered. I shall tell him where the blame lies.

BARBARA

(*With a desperate subdued cry*)

Oh, Mrs. Parton, how can you?

MRS. PARTON

You think me a cruel and bitter mother? Judge me by what I gave up for him. I had enough motherhood for the world, and the world seemed full of little children; poor little children in the slums, sweatshops, factories—suffering, you know how. I loved them all and gave them the best of my womanhood, my hours day and night. I saw my youth going into their bodies; I watched strength grow, the seeds I planted flower. I was of use. It was all mine; I was not wasting the motherhood in me. Then Phil's father came and the woman in me spoke. I married him when he promised to let me go on with my work—but promises before marriage mean nothing. I didn't want a child till it came; the way with many of us. Yet my husband wished it just as he really wished me to give up my work. Then I grew to love Phil because he was mine. I didn't mind the service of all my hours; but when his father died, I found the boy completely absorbed my life—for I had to lose my grief somewhere. And I never could go back to the work; Phil was ill, oh, so ill, all those early years; my jealous hands would let no other tend him. I often thought, too, of all those other children who needed just a little of what I gave in full to Phil; but he was my care and consolation. So you see at heart I was all mother. (*Quickly*) And do you ask me to tell you what terrible things Phil has done, things I haven't dared phrase to myself—?

BARBARA

(*Shuddering*)

No, no—

MRS. PARTON

(*Patting her tenderly*)

I won't; don't fear, child, I won't. (*She turns away.*) But when I was protecting him and watching him and—and *saving* him, I saw before me those other children where you are, in the Settlement, who would have been made better by me if they'd only had what I gave him. So many women waste their motherhood as I've done, and the world needs it all. Take your love *there,* dear, where it will be of use. Don't throw it away on Phil; don't give up your work.

BARBARA

(*Hysterically*)

I don't want to work; I hate those slums and those children. I deceived you from the first; they don't mean to me what they mean to you. I haven't that *kind* of motherhood. (*Not letting* MRS. PARTON *speak*) Now let me say what's been struggling in me. I told you you didn't know me. *They* won't miss me down there—they haven't. I was made to love a man and have children of my own, and I knew it when Phil came. So I gave up that work, yes, willingly, a year ago. And because I felt I had the right to ask it of him for what I gave in return, I've been living on his money. He's been caring for me.

MRS. PARTON

Barbara!

BARBARA

There isn't anything in the world but him, and you've shown him to me as he is. And what have you left me?

MRS. PARTON

Terrible!

BARBARA

Yes; it was terrible for a mother to speak this way. What right had you to say his coming to me was wrong? How do *you* know it will be waste? Why were we brought together? Why do our whole natures cry out to each other? (MRS. PARTON *recoils.*) Oh, that hurts you, does it? Well, are you wiser than the forces within us?

MRS. PARTON

(*Desperately*)

That's what tricks us and throws us aside alone.

BARBARA

Then why does it come? How can it leave me any more alone than I have been, than your words have made me? Oh, and I only wanted someone to take care of me.

MRS. PARTON

(*Turning* BARBARA *towards her forcibly and looking into her eyes*)

You have been his—?

BARBARA

Don't you wish it were only that? I'm not, no, no. He asked me to keep it from you so he could get more money to take care of me—I see that now. But I shan't be silent any longer. Look what you have done trying to shape my life to yours! I am his wife —and *more!*

(BARBARA *sinks sobbing to the sofa.* MRS. PARTON *stands tense and silent. Gradually the horror at all she has said steals from her face and she slowly relaxes into an acceptance of the situation. She looks towards* BARBARA *sadly and then crosses to her. After a moment's hesitation she puts her arm about* BARBARA *and pats her reassuringly.*)

MRS. PARTON

All over again! Forgive me, Barbara. I suppose there's still something a mother can do.

(*They sit there quietly for a while; then* BARBARA'S *hand slips into that of* MRS. PARTON.)

THE CURTAIN FALLS

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